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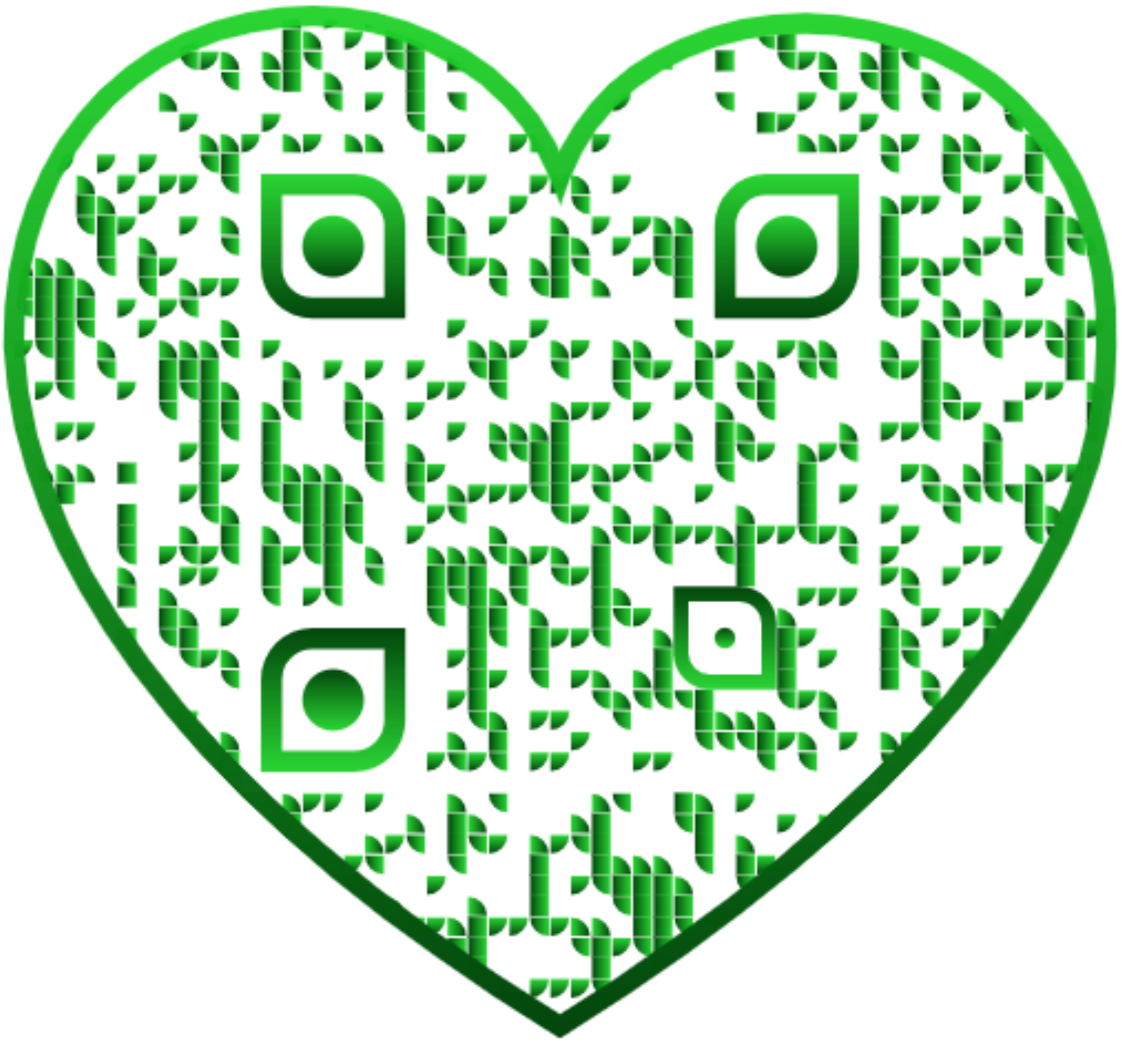

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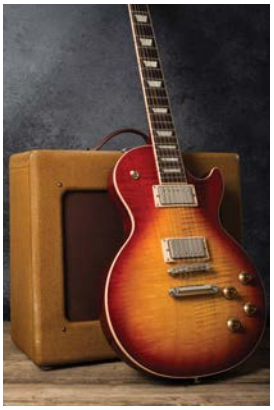
The best things in life...

There's no such thing as a free lunch, or so the old saying goes. And while that might be true, there is such a thing as a free handbook. This month we're giving every reader the opportunity to download a digital version of our *Essential Tone Tips, Mods & Upgrades* special for the grand total of zero pounds. Simply turn to p23 to find out how to get your copy of a publication that you'll want to keep close at hand for many years to come as it contains 132 pages of expert guitar and amplifier maintenance advice and hundreds of easy steps to better playability and tone. It's the gift that keeps on giving.

In the main mag this month you'll also find plenty of sound advice, not least in the shape of Huw Price's forensic guide to vintage Les Paul tone. As well as testing vintage and modern hardware and electronics, Huw's findings might just surprise a few people, especially those who insist that 'old wood' is the key to the magical sounds of 1950s. Turn to p62 now to find out more.

By the time you read this, our Guitar Masterclass with Darrel Higham will be a distant memory, but if you are lucky there may still be a handful of tickets available for our Jon Gomm and Guthrie Govan events - head to www.eventim.co.uk/masterclass to guarantee your place at what are sure to be illuminating evenings. I'll see you down the front...



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In this issue...

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

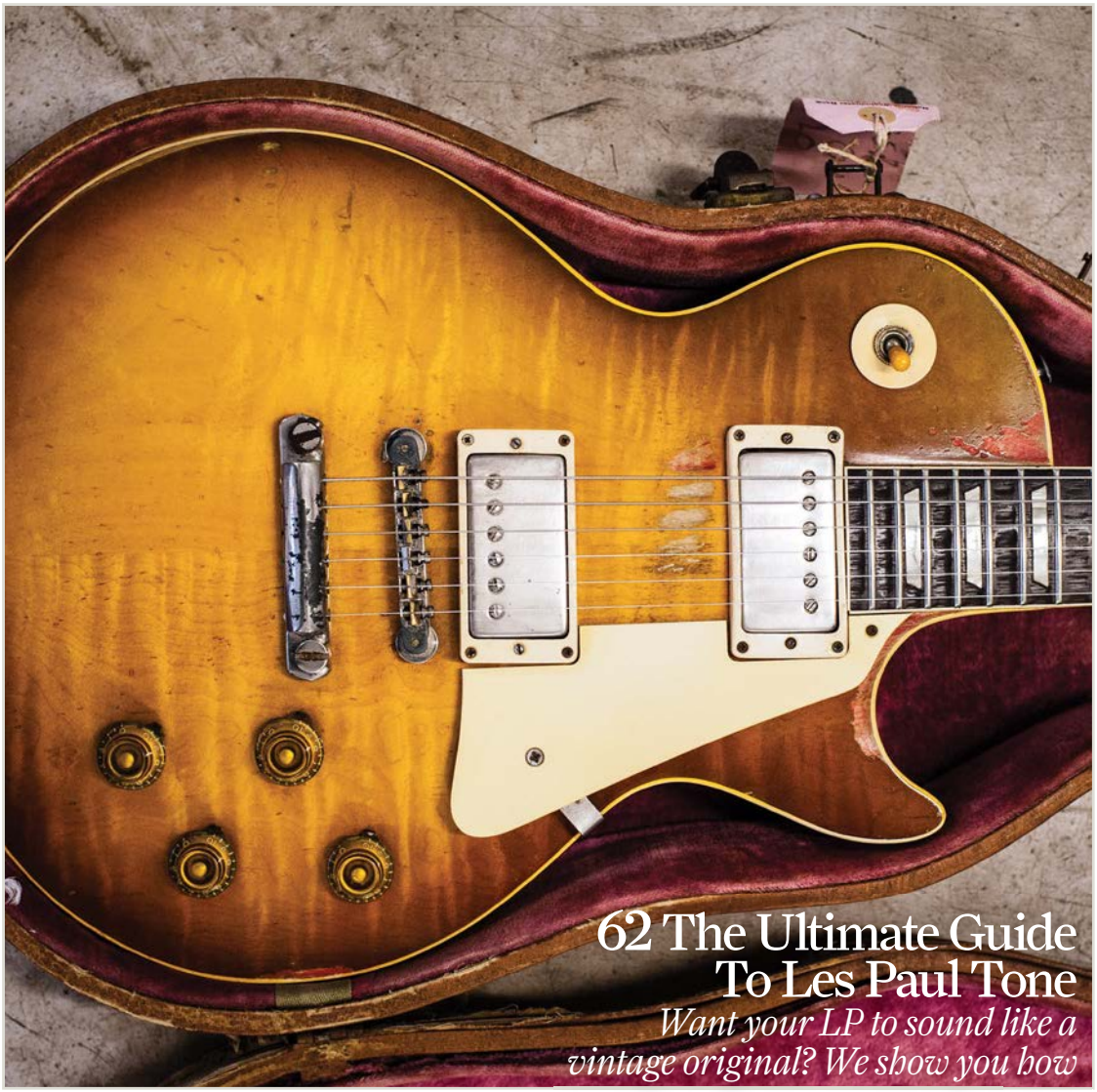
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker



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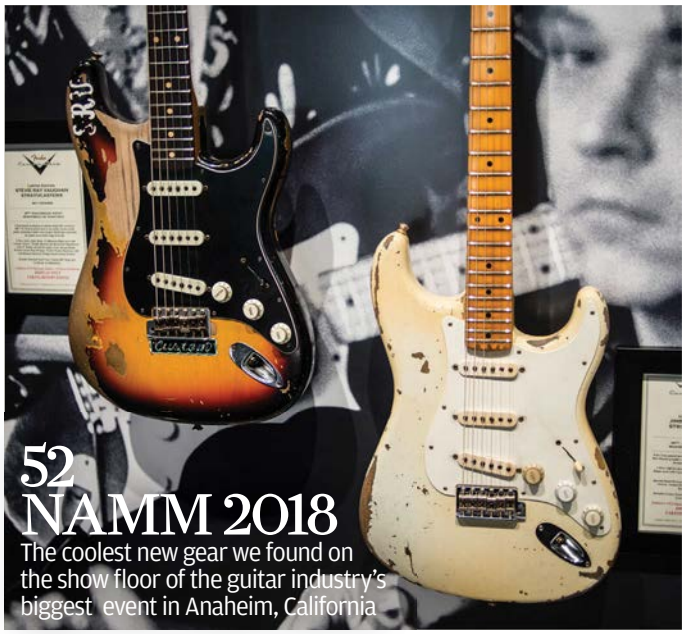
Want your LP to sound like a vintage original? We show you how



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The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

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CLASS OF 2018

What do Gibson's new 2018 models have to offer players looking for a sensibly priced Les Paul with vintage stylings? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out...

Gibson just can't stay out of the headlines. And if the old adage that 'there's no such thing as bad publicity' is true, then Gibson's decision to skip the Winter NAMM Show and head to the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas instead – complete with an appearance from the fastest man in history, Usain Bolt – might just have been a smart bit of marketing. And while reports on the company's finances continue to paint a less than rosy picture, despite the forays into lifestyle and pro-audio, Gibson's core business is still the manufacture – and sale – of an awful lot of electric guitars.

For several years now, Gibson's Nashville-made USA line has been subject to annual updates – lest we forget the G Force tuners, Zero Fret Adjustable Nuts and wider necks and fingerboards of 2015 – and in order to sample the class of 2018, we grabbed a pair of new Les Pauls from the wall of the new Peach Guitars superstore in Colchester. Although the 2018 line does include some more radical-looking models such as the HP-II in Hot Pink Fade, we opted to cast an eye over the Les Paul Classic and Traditional as they're likely to be more universal in their appeal.

The Traditional aims to tick all of the right boxes for fans of the Burst aesthetic without heading either too far down the rabbit hole of vintage accuracy or too far into orbit in terms of price. You get a choice of three sunburst finishes, an AA grade figured maple cap on a non-weight-relieved mahogany body, a nicely-rounded mahogany neck with a rosewood fingerboard, binding nibs on the fret-ends and a gloss nitrocellulose finish. For aniline dye, hide glue, a long neck tenon, a deeper top carve and visible maple in the cutaway you'll have to visit Gibson Custom and part with at least twice as much cash.

Case candy is generous and includes the pickguard and pickup selector 'poker chip' (should you wish to fit them) plus a Gibson logo-embossed leather strap and a handy multi-tool for maintenance purposes. There's also a photograph of your instrument taken following final inspection at the factory.

Les Is More

The Sunburst Traditional model comes loaded with a BurstBucker 1 and 2 in the neck and bridge respectively, while the Classic – represented here in moody all-black but also available in Goldtop and Pelham Blue configurations, all three with plain maple tops beneath the paintwork – harks back to '56 and features a pair of P-90 pickups. Unlike the Traditional, the Classic features Grover

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LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

There's a fair bit of competition in the sub-£2,000 single-cutaway stakes. **Eastman's SB59 Goldburst** (**£1,399**) has a nitrocellulose finish and Seymour Duncan 59 humbuckers, while new for NAMM 2018 was the **SB56/n-GD** (**£1,769**) in the company's new Vintage Nitro with Lollar Custom Soap Bar P-90 pickups. **Maybach's Lester Cherry Lane 58 Aged** has a chambered body but plenty of vintage Burst vibe for **£1,730**. The **PRS S2 Singlecut** (**£1,399**) is further away from the source in visual terms but a highly evolved and toneful variation on the theme

machineheads rather than vintage-style keystones, speed knobs rather than bonnets and a player-friendly slim-taper neck profile.

Features common to both guitars include Gibson's 'Tektoid' graphite nut, Orange Drop tone capacitors, Gibson-branded potentiometers, and aluminium shielding plates in the control cavity. Both instruments are equipped with strap buttons that are approximately 15mm in diameter rather than 12mm vintage-style buttons and, in combination with our favoured Grolsch washer straplocks, they feel reassuringly secure when strapped on.

Although Gibsons were never built with laser-like precision, the overall construction standard exhibited by both guitars is neat and clean and bang-on for the money, with very little to complain about. The abundant striping on the Traditional's flame maple top is worthy of note: it ripples beautifully under light and invites you to dive in. Its rosewood fingerboard could perhaps have been given one more pass with a fine-grade sander before leaving the Gibson factory, but it's nothing that a few minutes with some Micro-Mesh can't remedy.

The Traditional feels immediately familiar and like all the best neck profiles, it just gets out of the way

In Use

The Traditional feels immediately familiar and like all the best neck profiles, it just gets out of the way. The rounded C isn't the deepest you'll encounter on a Les Paul, especially down towards the nut, but experience tells us that the shape of the carve has more influence on player comfort than overall depth – we've played many chunky necks that, thanks to elegantly carved shoulders, make a nonsense of the notion that slimmer profiles are easier to handle. Likewise a slim profile with too much shoulder can quickly be fatiguing during a long live set or recording session.

The size and shape of one's hands also plays a part but we can't imagine many players finding fault with the Traditional's supremely comfortable dimensions or excellent medium weight. The Classic, meanwhile, is a much heavier beast at 10.2lbs but the body-heaviness is more noticeable when playing seated than standing as when strapped on, the weight is

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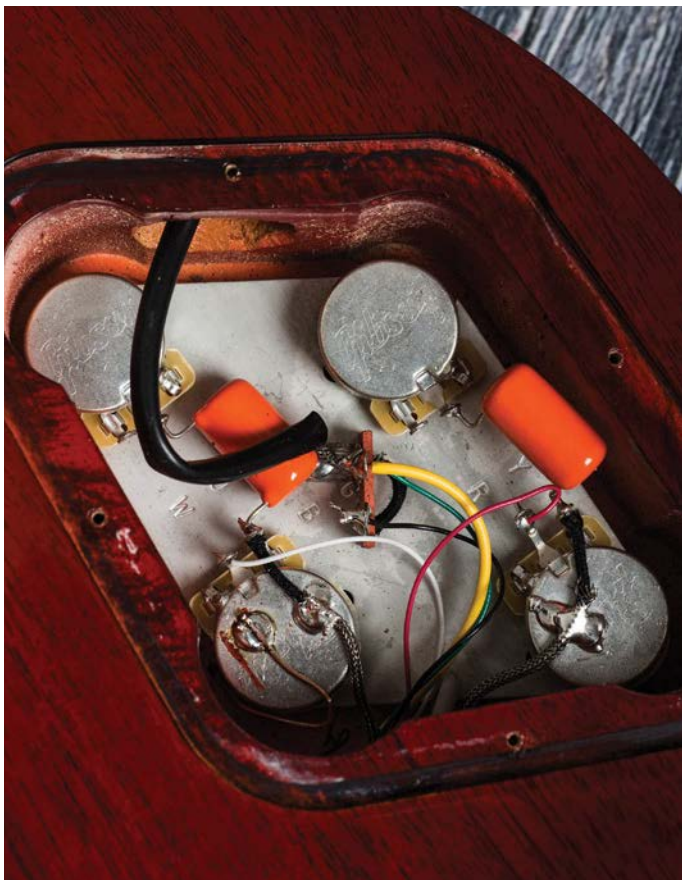

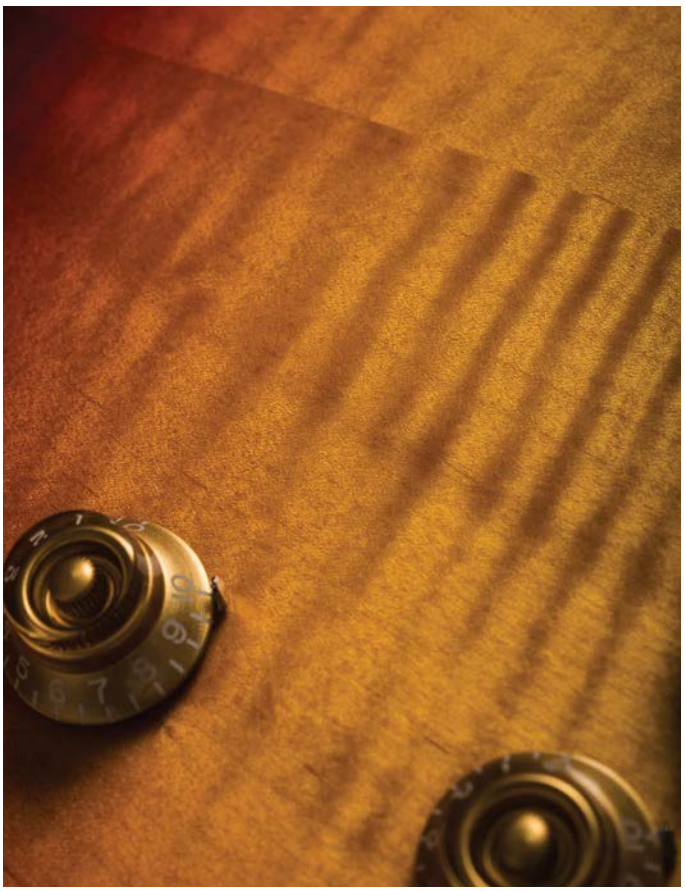

distributed very evenly. Don't let the weight put you off, either – some of the very best sounding Les Pauls we've ever encountered have been 10-pound Goldtops. The Classic's Slim Taper neck is more of a nod to the early 60s than the 50s, but happily it's not as emaciated and flat as some Gibson necks from the 60s era.

So what is it about Les Pauls with P-90s that has us completely smitten? They simply do pretty much everything very well, and are really inspiring in the process – whether it's the raunchiest filth or pretty, almost Strat-like cleans and all points in between. Plug a good P-90 Les Paul straight into a low-powered tweed amp and there's enough tonal variation on tap to make a whole album and never need to change guitars. The Classic exhibits some of these characteristics but there's definitely a hotter P-90 vibe here that isn't quite as woody and cultured as that of the lower-wound pickups of the early 50s – it's a real rocker though, and it works fantastically well for punk and power-pop riffs and rhythms. Where some P-90 LPs feel made for tweed, for lead work we prefer the Classic into an amp with more of a cranked Blackface vibe – a range of expressive and creamy solo tones await discovery.

Plugged in, the Traditional is lively, with plenty of sustain and resonance and enough high-end to do what lots of 1990s Les Pauls with humbuckers can't – ie, go beyond mid-rich rock tones into a cleaner world and offer much harmonic interest. That said, it's a guitar with a big voice with huge bass as well as treble, and it handles aggressive rock 'n' roll and lead fireworks very well indeed. There's plenty of high-end retained when you roll back the volume controls too, although neither tone pot does a great deal until the lower reaches of its taper – as a result, the menu of Clapton-esque 'woman' tones on offer is somewhat reduced.

There are certainly more sophisticated and focused PAF-style humbuckers out there than Gibson's BurstBuckers but the quality of the chassis is very good here so it wouldn't be a false economy to upgrade – and we'd likely be saying the same thing about the pickups if it were a seven grand Collector's Choice model. But this is a good-sounding Les Paul nevertheless, and only those chasing truly authentic Burst tones will likely hear anything amiss – head to p62 now if you don't know your Astrons from your elbow but want the sound of a 1950s guitar without breaking the bank.

KEY FEATURES

Gibson 2018 Les Paul Classic

- **PRICE** £1,799 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody, single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with plain maple cap, set mahogany neck, 12-inch radius bound rosewood fingerboard with acrylic trapezoid inlays and 22 medium cryogenically treated frets
- **HARDWARE** Nickel ABR bridge and aluminium stop tailpiece, Grover tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x P-90 pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.4mm at first fret, 25.3mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.2mm at nut, 51.3mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 10.2lbs/4.6kg
- **FINISH** Ebony nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Goldtop, Pelham Blue
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars 01206 765 777 **peachguitars.com** **www.gibson.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Stripped-down Black Beauty vibe is hugely appealing
+ No shortage of attitude
– A bit on the heavy side for some

Proof that P-90 Les Pauls can rock with the best of them, and look seriously cool in the process

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Gibson 2018 Les Paul Traditional

- **PRICE** £2,199 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody, single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with AA flame maple cap, set mahogany neck, 12" radius bound rosewood fingerboard with acrylic trapezoid inlays and 22 medium cryogenically treated frets
- **HARDWARE** Nickel ABR bridge and aluminium stop tailpiece, vintage-style keystone tuners
- **ELECTRICS** BurstBucker 1 (neck), BurstBucker 2 (bridge), 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.4mm at first fret, 22.7mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.8mm at nut, 51.4mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.6lbs/3.9kg
- **FINISH** Heritage Cherry Sunburst nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Honey Burst, Tobacco Sunburst Perimeter

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ It certainly looks the part
+ Comfortable neck, great weight
+ No eccentric spec decisions
– Slightly rough fretboard

Don't assume you have to go straight to the Custom Shop for a high-quality Sunburst Les Paul

9/10

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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

That Old Black Magic

In 1953, Les Paul asked for a guitar that "looked like a tuxedo", but by the late 60s the Custom had built its own legend. **HUW PRICE** checks out a strummer from '69...

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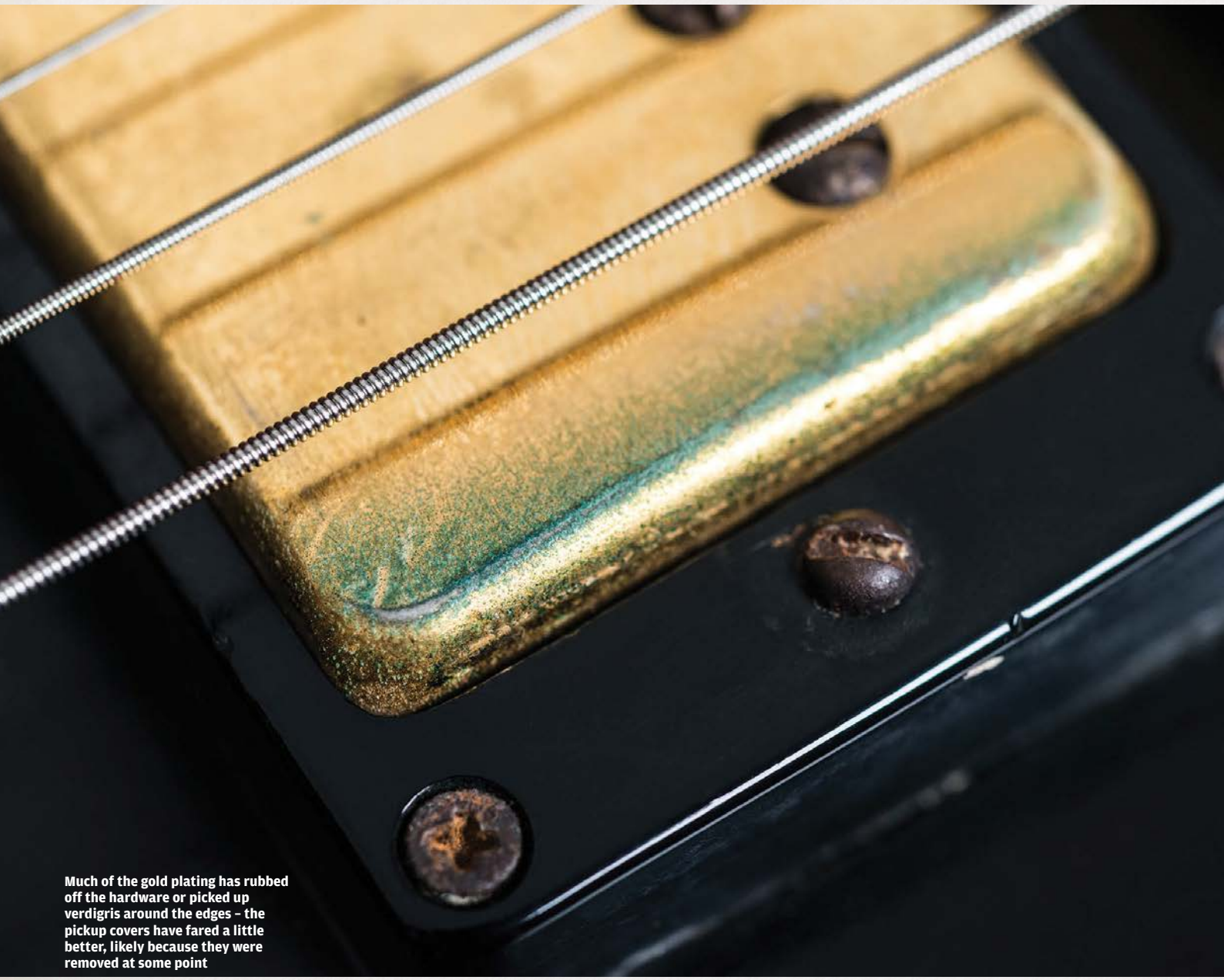

Much of the gold plating has rubbed off the hardware or picked up verdigris around the edges – the pickup covers have fared a little better, likely because they were removed at some point

The luxurious Les Paul Custom evolved throughout the second half of the 1950s and continued to do so following its reintroduction in 1968. Until 1963, all single- and double-cutaway Custom bodies were made purely made mahogany. When the Les Paul Standard acquired two PAF humbuckers in 1957, the Custom got three. Its fingerboard was always ebony to match the black lacquer finish.

For its '68 comeback, the Custom reverted to two humbuckers – by now Patent Number units were de rigeur in Kalamazoo – and the headstock angle was altered from 17 to 14 degrees. The body also finally acquired a maple cap and Gibson attempted to streamline the production process.

During the 1950s, Gibson routed the wiring channels into the mahogany back then glued a mahogany cap on top before routing the control cavity. The top arch was a complicating factor – the base of the control rout had to be angled so that the cap depth was sufficiently thin enough for the control pot shafts to pass through the holes.

In 1968, Gibson began routing the wire channels and the control cavity into the mahogany back before gluing the cap on. According to guitarhq.com, this changed in February 1969, when Gibson reverted to

Look closely and you'll see how the Gibson logo evolved from 1952 to 1969 as it migrated north

1950s practice and the control cavity has a maple 'step' near the bottom where the depth was altered after gluing the cap.

Shortly afterwards, Gibson introduced the 'pancake' body with a two-layer mahogany back sandwiching a thin layer of maple. By mid '69, headstocks acquired 'made in USA' markings and a volute.

Assuming all this information is accurate, it helps to pin the manufacturing date of this Les Paul Custom down to a fairly specific timeframe. This guitar has the step rout cut into the maple so it was made after January 1969, but there is no evidence of a 'pancake' layer. Furthermore, there is no volute or 'made in USA' stamp. On that basis, this was probably on Gibson's production line sometime between February and May 1969.

The guitar's black lacquer has shrunk sufficiently to reveal a join line in the maple top that's about 15mm to the side of the bass

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1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom

- **PRICE** £8,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with maple cap, set mahogany neck with short tenon joint, bound ebony fingerboard, block markers and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage Kluson tuners, ABR-1 bridge with retaining wire, stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Patent Number humbuckers
- **FINISH** Black nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 624mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.4mm at nut, 52.04mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 25.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 5.09mm at nut, 51.93mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.68kg/10.31lbs
- **CONTACT:** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**

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tailpiece post, but it's probably the only part of this guitar that hasn't changed colour since 1969. Much of the gold plating has rubbed off the hardware or picked up verdigris around the edges, the clear coats over the binding have yellowed considerably and by the same process, the pearl inlays on the peghead have acquired a golden hue.

Look closely and you'll see how the Gibson logo evolved from the 'kissing dot' style of 1952 to the missing dot of 1969 as it migrated northwards away from the tuners. Speaking of which, its machineheads are patinated waffle-back Klusons and paired with its bound headstock, it's a truly classic Gibson look.

The 1950s Les Paul Customs were known as 'fretless wonders' because they were fitted with low frets to attract non-string bending jazz guitarists who wanted easy chording and a fast action. Although the Les Paul was reintroduced at the behest of rockers, Gibson possibly believed the reissue Custom might have jazz appeal. This Custom still has its narrow and low factory frets, so any prospective owner will need to make a decision with regard to playability.

This old road warrior has patina in spades, yet it feels clean, solid and pleasing to play

Although currently fitted with a replacement tailpiece, the original will be sold with the guitar. In all other respects the Custom appears entirely original, from its five-ply pickguard to its witch hat knobs, control pots and Sprague Black Beauty tone capacitors. The Patent Number pickups are correct, too, although the covers have been removed at some point – this possibly explains why the gold plating on them has largely survived so well. The control cavity solder joints appear untouched.

This old road warrior has patina in spades, yet it feels clean, solid and pleasing to play. A fair amount of finish has worn off the back of the neck, but it's smooth to the touch and it's interesting to observe how Gibson blew the black coats over clear lacquer. You could no doubt lift out some of the stains and ingrained dirt from the finish, but in doing so much of the Custom's appeal and value could be lost.

In Use

The outline may be much the same, but by 1969 the feel and tone of a Les Paul was very different to that of the legendary Bursts of

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the late 1950s. There's something hefty, solid and even brutal about this Custom that has an appeal all of its own. Weighing in at over 10lbs and with a neck that's on the chunky side of fat, it's a guitar that requires physical commitment from the player – that is, unless you're a jazzer who gets to perform sitting down, of course!

Acoustically it's fairly resonant, the transients are quite soft and the overall tone has a smooth, fat and compressed quality. There are issues with the G and B string saddles because both strings sound rather muted irrespective of whether they're fretted or played open – happily, this is an easy fix and we note that the bridge has the intonation adjustment screws facing the stop tailpiece. It may seem like the logical way to do it, but when the tailpiece is set close to the body, the sharp break angle can cause the strings to foul against the screw heads, as is the case here.

This Custom really comes to life when it's plugged in – with a big, powerful and strong sound

While we've often marvelled at the unplugged tones of vintage Gibsons, the Custom only comes to life when it's plugged in – but it soon makes up lost ground. This Custom generates a big, powerful and strong sound. The niceties of upper harmonic bloom and touch-sensitive dynamics aren't what this Les Paul is about – instead, the bridge pickup provides solid powerchords with deep and growling lows and a useful resonant cut in the upper mids that enhances definition.

Single notes on the neck pickup have a percussive front end that's more of a robust thump than a stinging slap, before easing into a flutey and pure sustain. Compared to PAF-style 'buckers, these are darker, however they're mellow without being bland and when you match them with high-gain amp settings, it's a complimentary combination for punk, power pop, heavy blues and hard-rock. The old-school Aerosmith sticker on the case is entirely appropriate...

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Chris Vinnicombe demos Fender's brand new-for-2018 American Original '50s Stratocaster and '60s Telecaster

Orange's Brent Hinds Terror is reviewed on p94 of this very issue – our YouTube channel features a full demo of the Mastodon star's signature amp

We caught up with Texas blues legend Jimmie Vaughan at NAMM 2018 to talk Stratocasters, Stevie Ray, Eric Clapton and much more

If you are wondering why we were so taken with Taylor's new V-Class bracing in last month's mag, check out our demo to hear it in action

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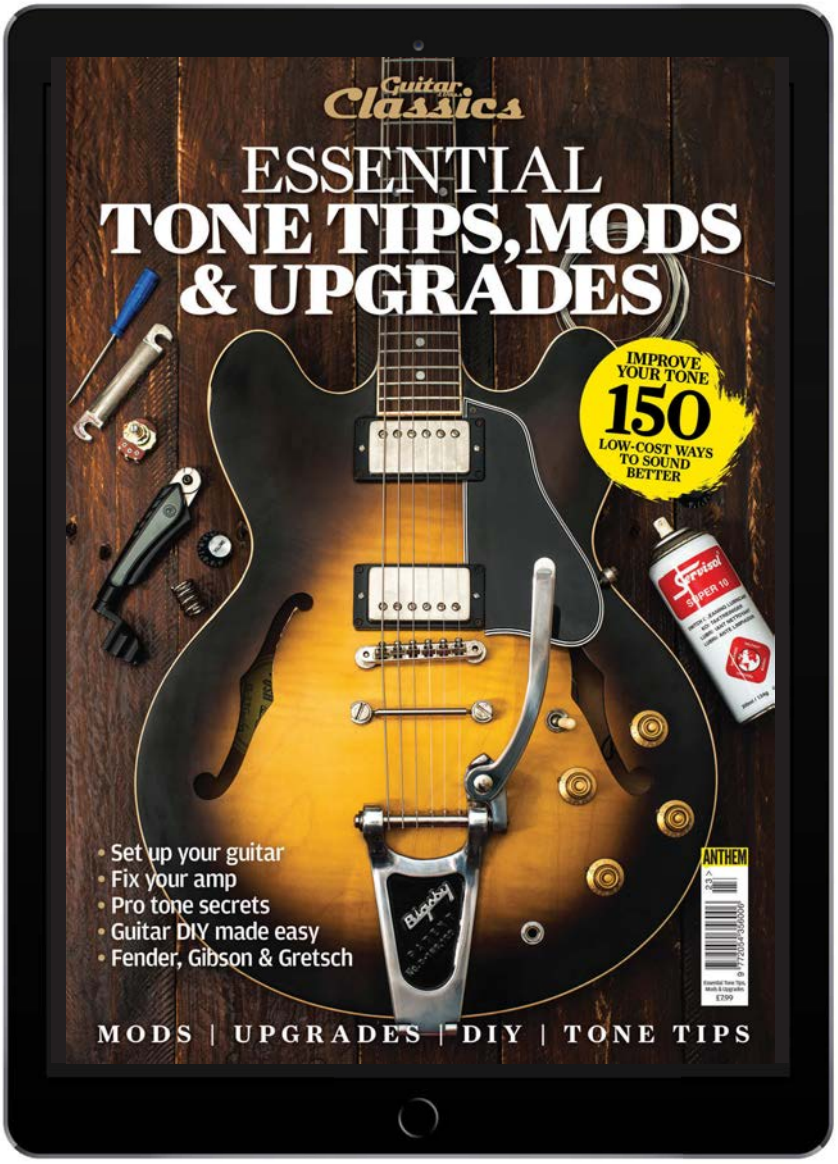

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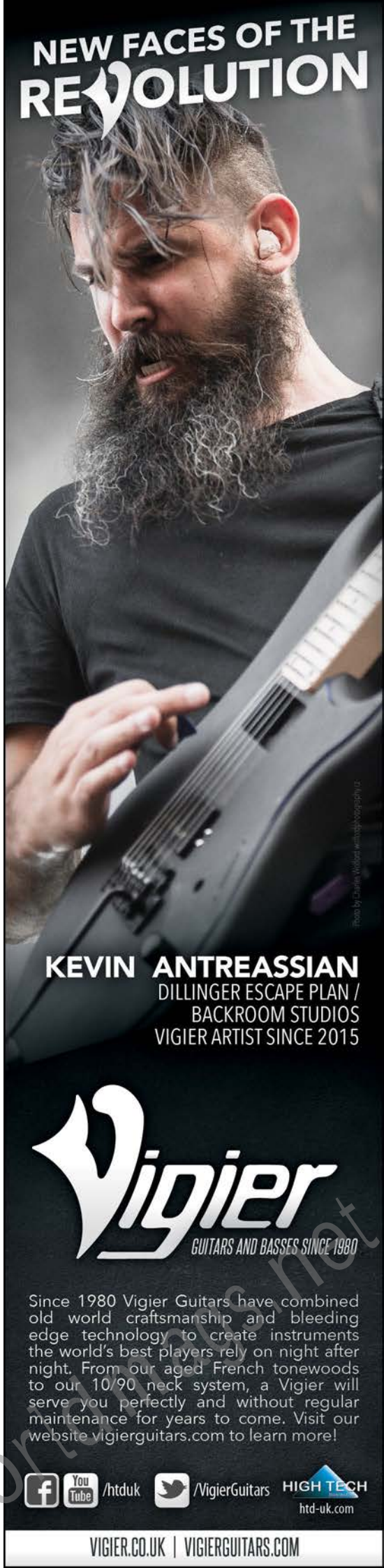

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Analogue delay pedals are all the rage in these retro-worshipping times, but wouldn't it be great to have a pedal that offered you all the sonic brilliance of an analogue pedal with the control and functionality of a modern digital device? If that sounds like just the ticket for you, Chase Bliss Audio's Tonal Recall pedal is the answer – and one lucky *Guitar Magazine* reader can win one in this month's fantastic competition!

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Lanterns On The Lake guitarist and producer Paul Gregory took an in-depth look at the Tonal Recall in our regular *Joy Of FX* magazine, and having used it for several months, he was blown away by the pedal. "It's truly incredible – as analogue delay pedals go its a work of art," he enthused. "The beauty of it is that if you want to use it as a simple slap echo, you can, or if you want tit to be an endless stream of sonic consciousness that cascades into a deluge of otherworldly lo-fi noise, you can. It does everything an analogue delay could possibly do."

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DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

MGL LEAD MASTER 20

MGL's amps were originally designed to show off high-end Les Pauls, but **DAVE HUNTER** finds out that this boutique New England brand will bring you superlative classic rock tones regardless of your guitar choice...

Before we crack on with this feature, you might well be asking, "What the hell is an MGL, anyway?" The short answer reads rather like a 'coals to Newcastle' story – but bear with me on this one. For you see, there are many reasons why this thoughtfully crafted rendition of classic Marshall-infused rock tone rendered in snowy rural New Hampshire deserves serious consideration back in Britain, from whence that iconic sound originated in the first place.

First, it's worth knowing that MGL stands for Mark's Guitar Loft – a dealership in Barrington, New Hampshire, which is operated by Mark Bishop and specialises in Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul reissues. For years, the demo amp in Mark's so-called loft has been a 1979 Marshall 2204 Master Model Lead amp – the 50-watt head that took Marshall not only into master-volume territory, but cascading gain along with it. And this is not just any 2204, but a particularly stellar one – a 50-watt head of great repute, praised far and wide by notable players who have swung by the shop to try out the likes of a flame-top Gibson R9 – custom aged and upgraded by Dave Johnson – among other carefully curated delectables.

So what to do about an amp that excels above the norms for a used Marshall? Clone it, perhaps.

KEY FEATURES

MGL Lead Master 20 head

- **PRICE** Approx. £1,253 excluding shipping and duties
- **CONTROLS** Pre-amp, master, treble, middle, bass, presence
- **OUTPUT** 20 watts
- **TUBES** 3x 12AX7 (aka ECC83) preamp tubes, 2x 6V6GT output tubes
- **FEATURES** Speaker outputs for 4, 8 and 16 ohms
- **WEIGHT** 11.8kg/26lbs
- **CONTACT** marksguitarloft.com

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But Bishop decided to go further: don't just clone it, improve it along the way – making it the amp that he felt Marshall should have built when creating this late-70s semi-classic in the first place.

The culmination of the first such effort was exactly that. Hand-assembled for Bishop by New Hampshire builder Guy Harvey – with much consultation from Evan Cantor, former co-owner of Bedrock Amps, and housed in cabinets made by Jeff Swanson – the MGL Lead Master 50 was a roaring 50-watt head that showed us what a no-compromise, fully hand-wired rendition of the 2204 (a great amp, but hailing from firmly within Marshall's printed-circuit-board period) could do, with a few of the original's niggling 'Yeah, but I wish there was a switch for that' issues taken care of along the way.

Bishop decided to go further: don't just clone it, improve it – make it the amp Marshall should have built

Following in its footsteps, the Lead Master 20 does the same trick in a 20-watt version powered by two 6V6GT output tubes (in place of the 50's EL34s), resulting both in a lighter carry and an amp that more comfortably hits the sweet spot at home, in the studio, and in smaller clubs.

But... 6V6GTs in an Marshall-style amp? Yes indeed. Although EL84s have been considered the bottles of choice for lower-wattage British-style amps, several makers have discovered that 6V6GTs arguably catch more of the characteristic flavour of such circuits, making it easier to adapt a front end that sounds 'right' through big EL34s to a half-power version via 6V6GTs in the back end, while maintaining the thick midrange and slightly granular breakup that we expect to hear in such amps. Which is not to say the 50-watter's front end was merely ported over to the MGL20; Bishop and Harvey put considerable effort into re-voicing each stage for the optimal frequency response via the less-powerful output stage, working hard to maintain both midrange and low-end girth, without allowing things to get overly boomy.

Hands On

Where many small makers will use off-the-shelf options for larger components for the sake of convenience, it's great to see Bishop commissioning a custom chassis for these amps. The black powder-coated affair with gold screen-print lettering looks elegant and professional, and should prove hard-wearing out on the road. The power and output transformers are custom-made by a small winder in St Louis, Missouri, while the choke – "a more important component than most people realise," Bishop tells us – is from Dagnall in England.

Coupling capacitors are mostly by SoZo, although the first 0.022µF in the chain is an NOS Philips 'Mustard cap.' They join carbon-film resistors on the tidily hand-wired, terminal-post circuit board, along with Mojo

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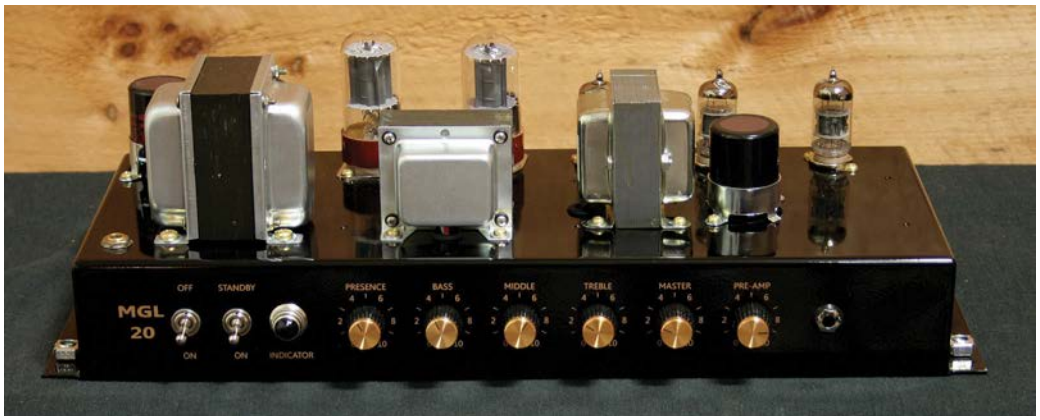

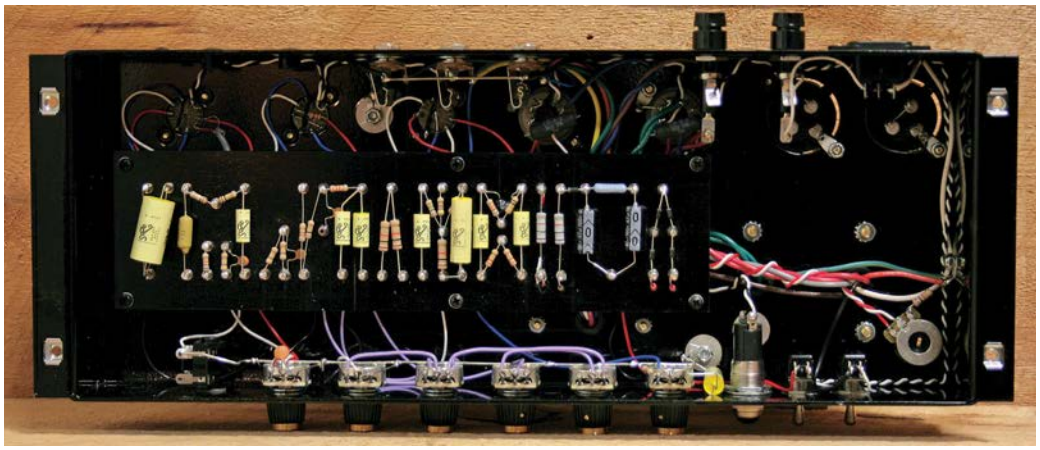

The Lead Master 20's custom-built chassis is black powder-coated, with gold silk-screen lettering. Inside, the hand-wiring is immaculately done and the components have all been carefully selected – many custom-ordered

The MGL Lead Master 20 provides a ridiculously easy road to that classic British rock tone

potentiometers and JJ filter capacitors elsewhere in the Lead Master 20's chassis.

Enclosing it all is a beautiful piece of cabinetry, made by respected craftsman Jeff Swanson of Beverly, Massachusetts. Its vintage M-style thin-sided head shell has also received an update, and is available in a range of Tolex colours. Bishop also plans to offer big-box and small-box sizes appropriate to the dimensions of different speaker cabinets. MGL has a custom 2x12 for the 50 that can be ordered for the MGL20, or there's a bespoke 1x12 to partner with the smaller amp. While these are excellent options, you can also just put it through whatever you'd normally like for your Marshall-style tones. And if at all possible, you need to experience the glories that I experienced before taking the test head home to my own studio for review, when Bishop insisted I open it up through his vintage Marshall 4x12 with early 70s Greenbacks in his warehouse-sized premises – using a Custom Shop Les Paul, of course. In short, there's nothing like it; and while the MGL20's raison d'etre is to bring in the grind at more club-friendly volumes, you could have told me I was playing through a full-bore 50-watter at the time and I wouldn't have blinked an eye.

Playing Through

Back home in the studio, whatever appropriate cab I play it through, the MGL Lead Master 20 provides a ridiculously easy road to that classic British rock tone. I test it with my own Gibson 1958 Les Paul Reissue with genuine '59 and '60 PAFs, a Telecaster, and a Novo Serus J with Amalfitano P-90s, and it turns each into an unbridled rock warrior. We tend to canonise the hallowed Plexi of the late '60s as the be-all and end-all of that sound, but I'd wager just as often when today's players, or music fans in general, conjure up an aural image of the ultimate rock-guitar tone, it's just as likely to have been generated by a late-70s to early-80s 2204 or 2203 (the latter the 100-watt rendition of the Master Model).

Wind up the Pre-Amp (ie gain) control past about one o'clock on the dial, and get the Master to at least 11 o'clock to let the amp breathe a little, and everything in the spectrum of classic and timeless rock-god-and-roll tone is right at your fingertips: thick, bitey cleans with the guitar's volume down to about five, meaty crunch at seven or eight, and singing medium-gain leads at 10. Simple, no-nonsense, and made to do just a few very specific jobs – but to do them very well – the MGL Lead Master 20 is, more than any of this, just a boatload of fun, and a superb little rock monster for 2018, all at what I'd call a great price for an amp of this calibre.

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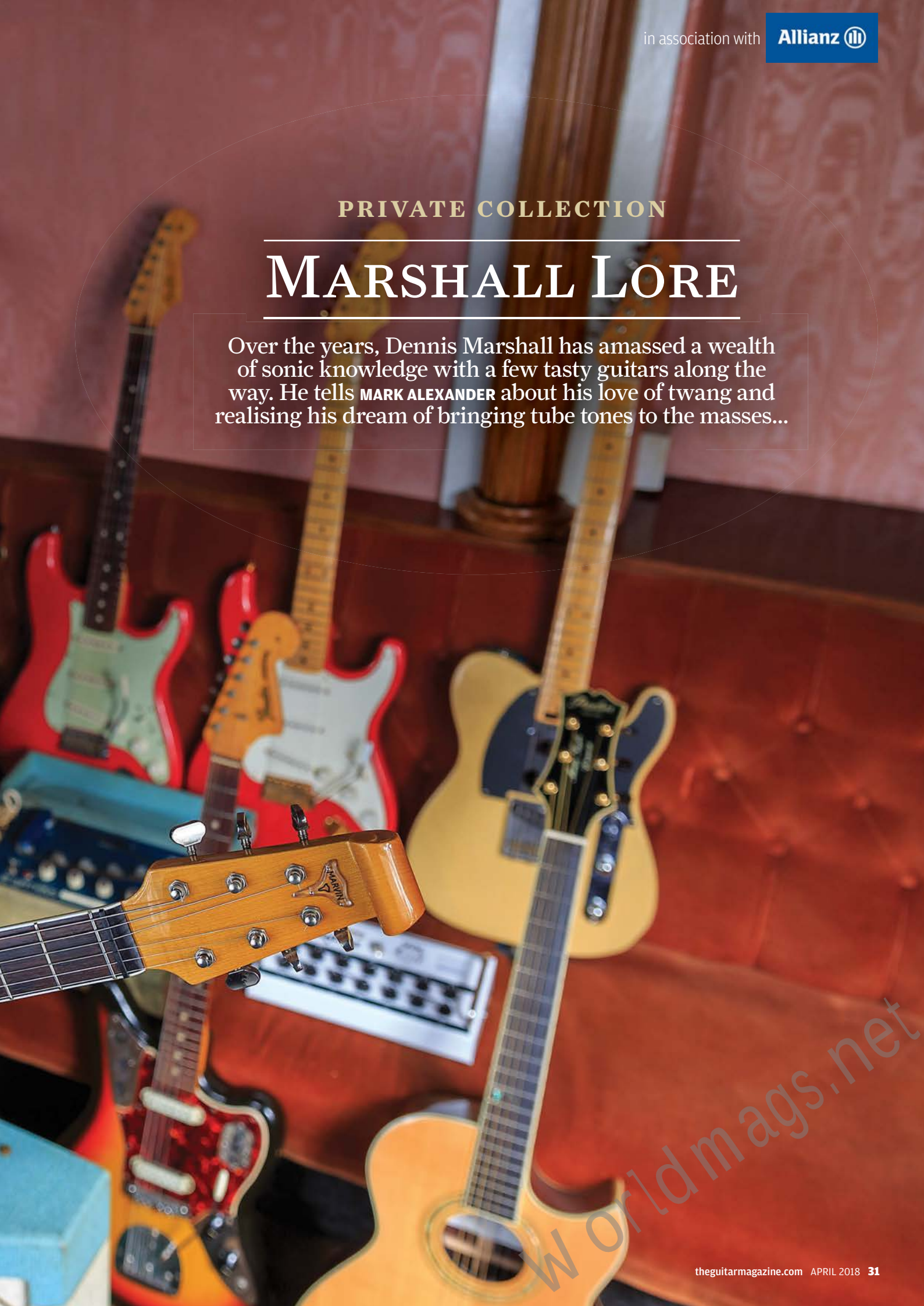
MARSHALL LORE

Over the years, Dennis Marshall has amassed a wealth of sonic knowledge with a few tasty guitars along the way. He tells **MARK ALEXANDER** about his love of twang and realising his dream of bringing tube tones to the masses...



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Dennis Marshall is an amp engineer and a guitarist with a love of melodic riffs. From his modest workshop in Fife, he repairs amps and pedals quietly refining his appreciation of tube-driven tone. Mild-mannered and likeable, Marshall is one of those hideaway geniuses who likes nothing better than a good chinwag.

Like the best behind-the-scenes techs, his client list seems almost implausible given his modest workplace. Carlos Santana, Martin Taylor, Ed Sheeran, The Darkness and Simple Minds are all part of a list rich with headline acts who have sought out his sonic wisdom.

Now it's our turn, but before unravelling his guitar collection and delving into his philosophy on amplification, we have to address the large elephant sitting in the room. "No, I'm not related," he says, "but it is awkward sometimes." Marshall, as it turns out, has never worked for, nor has any family ties with the well-known British amp manufacturer from Bletchley.

Indeed, to add to the brand confusion, Marshall was actually Mesa/Boogie's UK amp engineer for 12 years. Despite his rejection of nominative determinism, however, Marshall has certainly had a long affiliation with amps and guitars. He first picked one up in 1960 with Duane Eddy and Hank Marvin providing the inspiration. A Watkins Westminster provided eight watts of amplification for those early endeavours.

Carlos Santana, Martin Taylor, Ed Sheeran... like the best behind-the-scenes techs, Marshall's client list seems almost implausible

All About The Twang

His guitar collection still reflects that era. Indeed, despite his passion for amps, Marshall has surrounded himself with some choice instruments. Carefully selected and often modified, many hark back to the days when twang ruled. Each one, however, has its role to play and story to tell.

For instance, nothing screams twang like a Fender Custom Shop '59 reissue in Fiesta Red. Purchased in 2011, Marshall's beauty may be a looker but it also hides something special under the bonnet. "The pickups are one of the last sets of pickups Abigail Ybarra wound for Fender before she retired," he explains, "And she very kindly signed them for me. It sounds lovely. It has a very twangy, original Fender sound. It's a lovely looking guitar and it's great to play."

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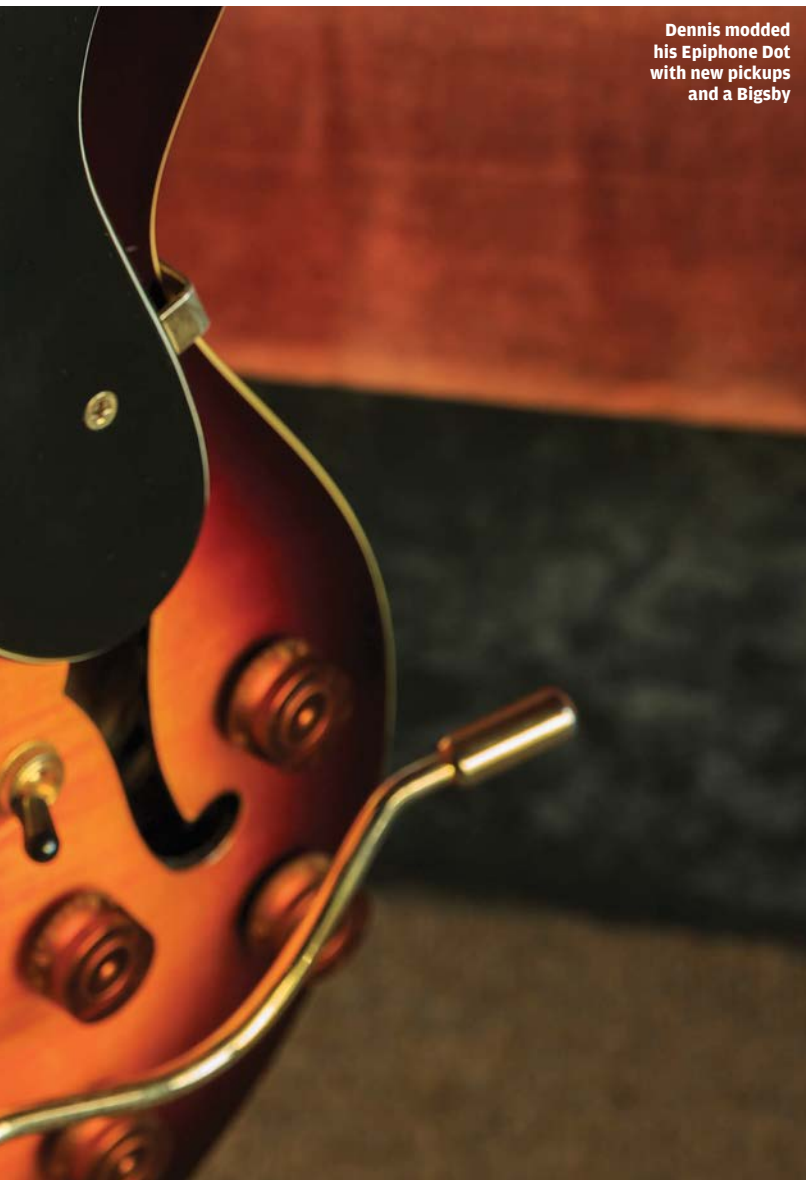

Dennis modded his Epiphone Dot with new pickups and a Bigsby

Marshall's 'workhorse' – his Custom Shop '59 Reissue Strat

His workhorse guitar also doffs its cap to the 50s, but with a notable change that goes beyond merely aesthetics. "This is my go-to guitar and one of my newest; I got it about four years ago," he says holding his Fender Custom Shop Strat with rosewood fingerboard. "Because of the brightness of the maple-neck Strat, I couldn't get the creaminess I wanted. So I went to Guitar Guitar in Edinburgh and they kindly got four different guitars for me to try from their different branches. Of the four, this one jumped out. It is one of 50 limited edition guitars that Guitar Guitar commissioned from Fender Custom Shop. The body and the pickups are '59, but the neck has a compound radius, big frets, the truss rod is adjustable from the headstock, the tuners are locking and it is C-shaped. When you sit it on your lap, it feels like an old guitar, but it plays amazingly well."

He also admits to a small tweak that he advises only those skilled in the art of guitar

Dennis has a big Fender haul including a pair of Custom Shop Strats, a '65 Jaguar and his modded Telecaster

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Marshall's Gretsch has been modded with TV Jones pickups and a Chet-style arm for the Bigsby

fettling should attempt. "I use 0.011 gauge strings with a wound third, which is quite unusual but it gives more tone," he says. "It's not as loud, so you have to compensate by poking up the third-string pole on pickup so it is raised above the others. Tone-wise, it is as close as you get to an original '59 Strat."

To complete the triumvirate of twang monsters, Marshall brings out his 2004 Burns Hank Marvin signature '63 reissue. The distinctive styling and trademark scratchplate are eye-catching, but it's the neck Marshall enjoys most. "Of all my guitars, this is the best player. The neck is fantastic. It plays like a Rolls Royce," he says. "All you have to do is breathe on the strings and they'll play whatever you want."

Acoustic Heaven

The Burns has been a companion since Dennis bought it in 2013, but a year later he was presented with a Peerless Martin Taylor prototype as part of a potential collaboration with the Korean firm. "They gave me the guitar in order to test out my acoustic preamp. But when I got it, it was a wreck. I spent quite a bit of money getting it all fixed up and then the tie-up with Peerless never happened but I was left with the guitar. Acoustically, it's not great, but through the preamp it is stunning."

Marshall is a man who likes to tinker. His mind is awash with possibilities and arguably his greatest work was carried out on a 2001 Epiphone Dot Special bought on a whim from eBay. "I was looking for a 335 but couldn't justify the cost. So I thought I would buy this guitar and if it was any good wood-wise, I would strip out the guts and put in new electrics. When it arrived, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end."

"My Burns plays like a Rolls Royce. All you have to do is breathe on the strings and they'll play whatever you want"

The same year, Marshall acquired his 2012 Gretsch Electromatic 5140, which bristles with rock 'n' roll intent after a couple of choice tweaks. "Brian Setzer does a version of one of my favourites tunes, *Sleepwalk*," Marshall recalls. "I had to do that, so I went looking for an orange Gretsch and found this one. I did my usual and put in TV Jones pickups, which just brought it to life. I also changed the arm on the Bigsby for a Chet Atkins arm because when I'm playing melodies, I like to hold the whammy bar. With that one, you can tuck it under your finger and hold it."

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Three of Dennis's vintage amps – a Selmer Truvoice, and a Watkins Dominator and Westminster

Dennis tweaked the circuitry of his Fender Super Champ X2

As he was Mesa/Boogie's UK amp repairer for years, this Mini Rectifier is a natural choice

MARSHALL'S AMPS

While he has no doubt discarded many in his years of tinkering and developing, Marshall has held on to a few amps along the way. "As a rule of thumb, a good amp has absolute clarity and headroom," he explains. "That's what gives you a base to work with. You can then achieve whatever sound you want with pedals. If you don't have clarity and headroom to begin with, that becomes very difficult."

As someone who repaired amps for Mesa/Boogie in the UK, it's no surprise to see one in his collection – a Mini Rectifier. "I got it in a swap," he explains. "I had seen one of the early Mini Rectifiers and the clean channel had lots of headroom and was wonderfully warm. So I swapped it with a client. It has the best overdrive tone ever. It ticks all my boxes regarding bluesy driven sounds."

The Fender Super Champ X2 is a bit outside of Dennis's comfort zone, but it's an amp that challenged his preconceptions. "I got one of the early ones to repair," he recalls. "Normally I don't like amps that have digital processors in them, but because this one has a valve output stage and a valve phase splitter, the sound was very good. Fender brought out the X2 with a load of vintage sounds that included the Deluxe Reverb, which is my favourite Fender tone. I spent £200 on the head and modified it by speeding up the semi-conductor circuitry. It gives you more dynamics in your playing, which makes it more like a valve amp."

One of the most striking amps in Marshall's collection is a well-worn Selmer Truvoice with a very convenient birthday. "It's one of the first ones. The reason I bought it was because it is exactly the same age as I am – within a week!" he chuckles. "The cabinet is marked July 1947. I have played it, but it's not usable – it doesn't have a mains transformer. It's a reminder of how much things have changed in my lifetime."

The final box that Dennis wants to talk about is an old Watkins Dominator – an amp that harkens back to his youth. "There was a local band in Edinburgh that had a couple of Dominators," he recalls. "Ever since then, I wanted one. About 10 years ago, a guy got in contact with me about selling his grandfather's Dominator. I had never seen one in such good condition. It still had its original slip cover. I paid nearly £1,000 for it."

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Dennis has a small but carefully selected guitar and amp collection

This Peerless Martin Taylor prototype has since been heavily modded by Dennis

"I bought Bare Knuckle pickups to replace the originals," he continues. "But they were loud and took away a bit of the tone. Axesrus produces its own interpretation of the Bare Knuckle blues pickup, and I bought two of those. They suit the guitar so well. They've got tone, but they've got a good bit of guts as well. They sustain. The guitar cost me £250 with a hard case but I've spent three or four times that on pickups, electrics and the Bigsby, and I will never part with it."

"When I took my modded Telecaster to shows as a demonstrator, I received more offers for the guitar than I did for the amps!"

History In The Making

Marshall's tendency to tweak reached an apex in 2005 when his desire to acquire a vintage Telecaster led him to a '52 Telecaster reissue which he duly stripped and upgraded with '52 Custom Shop pickups. The stimulus for the purchase is almost as compelling as the guitar he created.

"A customer of mine couldn't keep his wives, but he had collected some rare guitars," he explains. "He was about to separate from his fourth wife and he visited me with a tatty old guitar case from which he brought out an original Fender Broadcaster – the real deal, with all the authentic paperwork. It was serial number 162. The neck was signed by TG; Tadeo Gomez, who was an original guitar builder for Leo Fender. It was incredibly valuable and he asked me to keep it for three months because he wanted it out of the way. I fell in love with it. When he took it back, I missed it so much I got a Telecaster neck and body made for the Japanese market by Fender in Japan."

Pickups were accordingly stripped and new units installed, but Marshall wasn't finished there. "I added a tone circuit and changed the pickup selector to a four-way switch, with the fourth position giving the two pickups in series which gives you more volume, which is great for solos. When I took the guitar to shows as a demonstrator, I received more offers for the guitar than I did for the amps. I didn't take any of them. That'll go in my coffin with me."

He says that a lot. You get a sense that Marshall is happy with the guitars he has accumulated; slowly but surely amassing many of his tonal fixations. His 1965 Fender Jaguar embodies this careful stockpile but also adds the value of authenticity to his

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Orange is bringing Dennis's Acoustic Pre pedal to the masses

Dennis created the darkblue valve preamp to give him a guitar tone that wasn't coloured by an amp

collection. As a result, it is probably the most valuable instrument in his pool.

"Since the 1960s, I've wanted a Jaguar," he says reminiscing. "I found this one in Philadelphia from a dealer. The condition was unbelievable, as was the price at $2,000. I thought it was too good to be true, but bought it anyway and sent it to a friend in Las Vegas who confirmed it was the real deal! He sent it to me in bits, because sending it in the case would have been hugely expensive, and I put it back together."

Marshall added a drop-in Mastery Bridge unit, which made a huge difference to the guitar. "It was like night and day," he says. "It brought the whole thing alive. It brightens everything up."

It is the icing on Marshall's cake. "I've got my collection now," he says proudly, "and I don't need anything more. They all sound different, but each one has character. I love my guitars and the tones I can get out of them. As far as I am concerned, there are no holes in my collection. Every tone I want, I've got."

Born To Amplify

Away from his guitar collection, however, it's amps where Marshall has really found his passion – and he's spent the last 50 years repairing and perfecting them as a result. His quest started all the way back in 1964 when his school teacher offered to help him build an amplifier if he improved his marks in his physics class. A 30-watt, 2x12 valve combo was duly built. "It was stunning," he recalls, wistfully. "It had an entirely unique circuit that sounded amazing. It was like an AC30 but with more sparkle. It compressed beautifully because it had a valve rectifier, and it was clean with no distortion at all. I've never got that sound back."

Marshall pursued a career as an electronics engineer but continued to play guitar and bass in bands at night with his musical endeavours leading to a residency in Edinburgh's Telecoms Club. On the tech side, he kept his hand in repairing amps for local music shops and ultimately set up on his own, handling Mesa/Boogie's UK repairs.

He also devised his own amp design based around a high-end guitar preamp that could deliver tube tones direct to a mixing desk. He called it darkblue. "I wanted to hear more of the guitar rather than the amp," says Marshall. "I was looking for something to give me an edge, and that was it."

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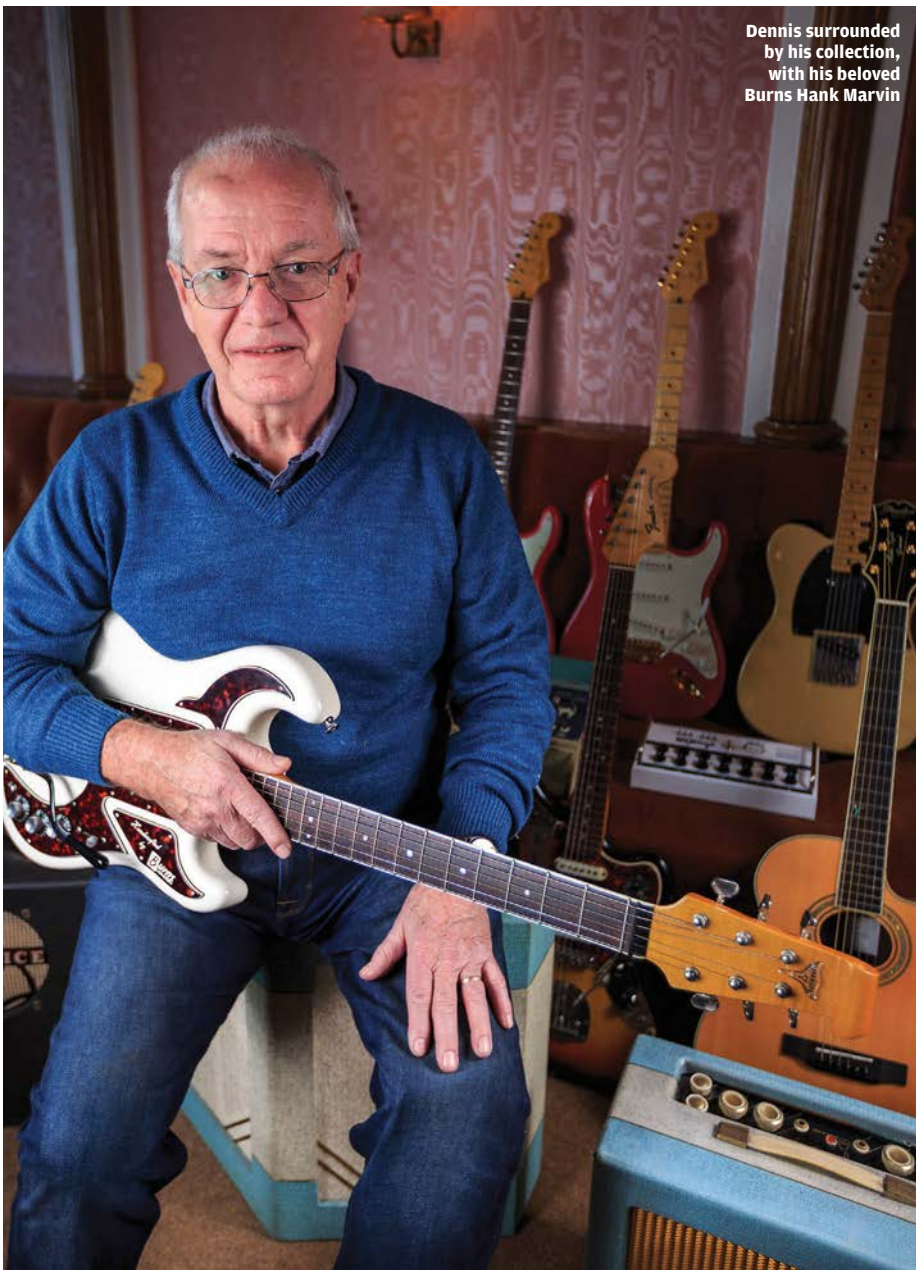
Darkblue was first adopted by Ally McErlaine from Texas and then George Michael's backline tech bought three. Marshall recalls an evening in 2006 when he was summoned to Hampden Park to demo darkblue during the Eagles soundcheck. Steuart Smith and Joe Walsh tried out the preamp in the empty, cavernous stadium, and bought one on the spot.

Various enterprises followed but the natural successor to darkblue, was a smaller preamp that would take darkblue's front end and apply it in the acoustic world. He manufactured his own Acoustic Preamp from his workshop in Fife from 2012 onwards but sought a company that could take his idea to a global audience. In 2015, he approached Orange.

The Acoustic Pre had a soft launch at NAMM 2017 followed by a formal unveiling at this year's show on the main Orange stand. "This time we're going in with the big boys," says Marshall. "It's what I've been after for a long time – to get the circuit I created out there."

Now in his 70th year, Marshall has indeed delivered his tube circuitry to the mass market. 50 years in the music business has furnished him with some great experiences, but now there is a sense of completion.

"I built my first amp in the early 60s and that has been my life since then," he says. "I love nothing more than rolling up my sleeves and getting inside an old amp. It gives me such a buzz to put one of these things together and it works."



Dennis surrounded by his collection, with his beloved Burns Hank Marvin

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THE REVERB TOP 10

DELAY PEDALS

Fancy adding some atmospheric bliss to your guitar sound? **DAN ORKIN** of Reverb picks out the most popular delay pedals sold on the online musical instrument marketplace...

Welcome to the second instalment in a series of articles that showcase the top-selling pedals from different categories on Reverb.com. As the world's largest music gear marketplace, we at Reverb see thousands upon thousands of pedals and effects sell through our platform every year giving us a unique pool of data from which to glean insights about the industry at large.

Last time around, we looked at the ever-expanding overdrive market. This month, we're turning our sights on that trusty sidekick to shoegazers and U2 tribute acts alike: the delay pedal. Today's rankings reflect sales on Reverb over the past year for both new and used delays, and include staples such as the MXR Carbon Copy, as well as some adventurous upstarts such as the EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run.

If you're in the market for a new delay for your pedalboard, hopefully these rankings provide some useful insights into what other players are opting for. Now, let's count down the top 10!

Seen something you need to add to your pedalboard? Head to Reverb.com and pick one up for yourself!

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1 MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay
The MXR Carbon Copy continues its reign as the most popular delay pedal on the market, a spot it's held for several years. This straightforward analogue box has become the default first choice delay for a wide range of players, and has spawned two different offshoots: the Carbon Copy Bright – which lightens the tone of the repeats – and the Carbon Copy Deluxe, which adds a few useful features.

2 Strymon TimeLine
The Strymon TimeLine is the undisputed benchmark for a growing class of pedals you might call 'do-it-all delays'. This box from the always-innovative Strymon can achieve just about every type of delay tone imaginable with 12 base modes and an enormously tweakable control set. It's a bit on the pricier side, but is probably the only delay pedal you'll ever need to buy. It sounds great when used with synths, too.

3 TC Electronic Flashback Delay & Looper
For something a bit more flexible and versatile than the Carbon Copy, lots of players look to the Flashback from TC Electronic. This pedal is readily available for not a lot of money on the used market and offers basic looper functionality in addition to its suite of delay styles.

4 Electro-Harmonix Canyon
Similar in format to the Flashback, the Canyon from Electro-Harmonix also includes a looping mode along with 10 distinct delay styles. This stompbox was launched in 2017 and ranked as the most popular new pedal on Reverb across all categories in our year-end rankings.

5 Line 6 DL4
The DL4 has been in production for nearly 20 years and is a true modern classic. Entire sub-genres of experimental rock music have been formed around the DL-4's sound set and its 'tweak' and 'tweez' controls.

6 Boss DD-7 Digital Delay
Carrying the torch for the ever popular and influential DD-3 and DD-5, the Boss DD-7 has been going strong for a decade. This pedal expands on the Boss delay template by offering longer delay times and an engrossing reverse delay mode.

7 Strymon El Capistan
Whereas Strymon's TimeLine is primed to cover virtually every delay type known to guitarist-kind, the El Capistan hones in on glorious, Gilmour-worthy tape echo. While not the only tape delay emulator on the market, the El Capistan is the most popular, probably due to Strymon's artist pedigree and superb build quality.

8 EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run
EarthQuaker Devices of Ohio has a reputation for superbly artful pedal designs that are less about comprehensive utility (like you'd find in the Strymon TimeLine) and more about offering a expressive, singular set of tones to play with. The Avalanche Run is a great example and combines delay with reverb for a stompbox that any soundscapist will certainly have fun exploring.

9 Boss DD-500
The DD-500 is Boss' foray into the 'do-it-all' delay subgenre and marked the first usage of a new large-box enclosure that has more recently been expanded to include the MD-500 Modulation and RV-500 Reverb. The DD-500 is another delay that can achieve essentially any setting you can imagine.

10 Boss DD-3 Digital Delay
As is the case with many Boss compact pedals, the DD-3 helped define the very concept of a digital delay stompbox. In production since 1986, there are a tonne of used DD-3s floating around on Reverb, so they are easy to find and relatively cheap. They sound great, too.

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Ones TO *Watch*

LAURENCE JONES

With a crowded mantelpiece and growing notoriety on both sides of the Atlantic, Josh Gardner meets one of the brightest young hopes of British blues...

The legacy of blues guitar in the UK is a storied and prestigious one – over the decades, the British scene has produced almost too many influential and creative players to mention. The latest young guitar player to try to live up to this intimidating legacy is 26-year-old Liverpool-born, Warwickshire-bred guitar-slinger, Laurence Jones. Since bursting onto the blues scene in 2012, Jones has scooped four British Blues awards – including three consecutive gongs for Young Artist of the Year, and most recently for Guitarist of the Year in 2016. In that time he's also toured with the likes of Johnny Winter, Walter Trout and Kenny Wayne Shepherd, but his journey to the blues began with a bit of old-fashioned family competition.

"My dad had an acoustic guitar lying around the house, and I remember when I was around six years old he would play *House of the Rising Sun*," Laurence recalls. "I really wanted to prove to my dad that I could be better on guitar than him!"

Classical and electric guitar lessons soon followed, but the real revelation came when he discovered Hendrix, and was inspired to do things his own way. "I tried to copy Hendrix's solos, but it didn't feel natural to me," he explains. "So I decided that I would always try to take influence from him and create my own style. After Hendrix, I looked at what other guitarists were doing at that time, and discovered Cream and Eric Clapton. Then, I read Clapton's biography and found out about John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers. I wanted to know *his* influences, so then I ended up discovering all the great blues guitarists such as Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and Lead Belly."

With his blues education well underway, the precocious 14-year-old Jones started a covers and function band, and started making a tidy wedge of cash out of his talents. But he soon came to realise that while playing in bands was fine, he wanted to step into the limelight as a singer and guitarist in his own right.

"I was earning good money, but when I decided to become a solo artist, I spent four years travelling around the country in a van earning hardly any money, paying my dues," he recalls. "I put the music first. I was not driven by money, I was driven by the dream – because

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if the dream was successful and my music was good enough it would sell itself."

It turned out that the dream was a smart one to follow – a debut album, *Thunder In The Sky*, arrived to a warm reception in 2012, followed by his sophomore effort, *Temptation* in 2014. The latter album was recorded in the legendary Dockside Studios, on the banks of the bayou in Louisiana, and immersing himself in the tradition while he was there. "Blues music is of course from America," Laurence elaborates, "I feel that we draw influences from there in the same way that The Rolling Stones did – creating an English sound that's inspired by American music."

Clearly it's a recipe that worked well for him, because he returned to the States to record his forthcoming new album, *The Truth* – though this time in the substantially more glamorous surroundings...

"My producer, Gregory Elias, wanted to put me in an environment that was going to constantly inspire me and the band, so he decided we should record at the legendary Sony Studios in Miami," Laurence enthuses. "I had a Grammy-winning team around me that guided me and the band to be able to express ourselves honestly to create the album. The atmosphere of Miami itself is so alive, and I think this came across through the recording process. I don't believe we could have recorded this album in England and achieved the same sound."

The sound he speaks of is more hooky and rocky than much of his previous work, with a driving energy inspired by the likes of Royal Blood and The Arctic Monkeys – and his guitar style has evolved to match.

"I think it's about the 'less is more' approach," Jones elaborates. "The solos are more concise and I tried to convey the emotion of the lyrics and mood of the song instead of just trying to impress people with guitar wizardry. I wanted my lead guitar lines and solos to be as melodic as my vocal parts."

"I always tend to come back to the Strat, it's just so easy to get the tones that are in my head... it feels like my guitar"

To power those lead lines, Laurence uses a variety of guitars, including a Les Paul, a Fender Jazzmaster/Tele hybrid and a Danelectro Baritone, but his first-call instrument is a battered barely sunburst S-type built for him by UK luthier Cameron MacKenzie, through a trusty Fender Hot-Rod Deluxe.

"All my heroes use or used a Stratocaster," Jones affirms. "It's such a versatile instrument and it really compliments my voice. I also love the shape of it because it feels comfortable on me. I always tend to come back to the Strat, it's just so easy to get the tones that are in my head. It was built for me by Cameron MacKenzie to fit my hand and spec, so it really feels like my guitar."

Needless to say, Laurence's childhood desire to play better than his old man has clearly paid off, but did he ever achieve his original goal? "In 2015, I was asked to play at the Royal Albert Hall with Eric Burden and Van Morrison," he chuckles. "My Dad was in the audience that night, and afterwards I came up to him and jokingly said, 'Well, I'm definitely better than you now!'"

Laurence Jones' new album *The Truth* is out 9 March on Ruf Records. He tours the UK in May. For more see www.laurencejonesmusic.com

Why I *Love My...* JON GOMM

& HIS LOWDEN 032C

The percussive fingerstyle virtuoso tells us why he loves his faithful Lowden acoustic called Wilma - even if she's got a few scars...

1 I love my...

"Wilma! It's a tough call between Wilma and Rocky, but the first love is the deepest. Wilma is my old Lowden that you can see me use in all my videos – it's a jumbo shape, spruce top mahogany back and sides, all scratched up to fuck... but more beautiful every day."

2 How I got it...

"So in about 1999 I decided I needed a Lowden, after going to see Nick Harper, who just has this sound where one acoustic guitar seems to have the power of a wall of Marshalls. I couldn't afford a new one, so I was searching through the reader ads in guitar magazines. The only Lowden I could find was in a magazine from 18 months previous. I called the number and the guy still had it, but he was based down south in Winchester and I didn't have a car. I mentioned it to my dad, and he said, 'That's weird, I'm going to Winchester tomorrow'. Fate spoke, and Wilma and I were brought together."

3 It's special because...

"She's just mine, she only fits me and I only fit her. Every scratch and mark is a song or a story. She's been my only company when I've been alone and desperate, she's the place I go when I need to say something important."

4 It's perfect for...

"Me, really. She's sounds weird, she's been glued back together so often. Anyone who wants to try to play or sound anything like me should try my Lowden signature model, which has all the best things about Wilma: the soulful tone, the power, the playability, but none of the weaknesses. My personal signature model I named Rocky. He's so well built and designed, he can withstand my playing. Wilma never could, the poor girl!"

5 It sounds best with...

"Newtone strings on it – ideally my signature gauge tuned down deep and low. Fishman pickups are also a great fit, but you'll want to have at least a dual-source system like the Rare Earth Mic Blend, if not three sources. Klotz cables: the best, no nonsense cables. I play into Sontronics mics in the studio, a Motu interface, Boss and Zoom pedals and a TC Helicon VoiceLive. I'm between amps right now!"

6 Hear it on...

"*Secrets Nobody Keeps*, my most recent studio album, featuring *Passionflower* and other less popular songs."

Jon Gomm is one of the stars of the Guitar Masterclass Series 2018, which takes place 7 March in London – purchase tickets while you can at bit.ly/gmgomm2018

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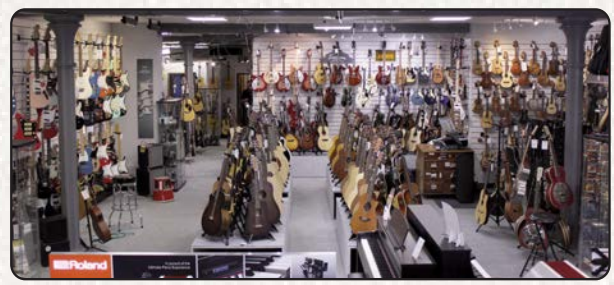

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Gibson's 'unusual' designs, Jaguar switches and tight neck pockets...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

A V-Class Act

Dear *TGM*, I read with interest last month's in-depth magazine devoted to Taylor's new V-Class guitars, expecting some sort of revolutionary new body shape or pickup system that would totally transform the way we play the acoustic guitar, but no, it's... bracing!? I couldn't quite believe all this fanfare and ceremony. The Taylor guys are honestly expecting us to get excited about the way they arrange the little bits of wood inside the guitar that stop the top and back from collapsing like a cheap trestle table – really?

And then I watched the video demo. Despite my initial cynicism I can honestly say that the proof of the pudding was in the eating – when I play parts similar to those that Chris plays in the demo, combining open strings with high fretted notes never sounds quite 'right' on my guitars, even though they are high-quality boutique and big-brand instruments. It seems like Andy Powers is really onto something. I await my first audience with a V-Class guitar in person with some degree of trepidation as I'm fairly certain that my credit card will end up getting a battering...

Carlton Tannen, *via email*

***TGM** We understand your initial reaction to an extent, Carlton – acoustic bracing might not seem like the sexiest thing in the world. But the reason we gave so much coverage to Taylor's new design is because it may well prove to be one of the most important developments in acoustic guitar manufacture since the arrival of X-bracing in the 1840s. The V-Class system's performance was positively revelatory for everyone here who played our review guitar, and this was mirrored during encounters with other V-Class instruments at Taylor HQ in California and the recent NAMM Show.*

We'd encourage any readers who are sceptical about V-Class to head over to youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and check out our demo – the guitar is remarkably in tune all the way up the neck, with phenomenal sustain and projection. Better still, visit a Taylor dealer and try one yourself when you get the chance!

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PAFing Around

Dear *TGM*, as a long term reader of the magazine I was interested to see the review on House Of Tone's Tru PAFs recently, because Matthew Bascetta made a similar humbucker for me back in 2016. I met Matthew at the Kempton Park Guitar Show, and on mentioning I was due to travel to Chester the very next day he invited me to visit his workshop near the city's historic North Gate.

I own a 2004 LP Standard and while I like its neck-loaded Seymour Duncan Antiquity, I'd always fancied something more vintage than the bridge's DiMarzio Super Distortion. So at HOT, I chatted to Matthew about making me something more vintage PAF to match the SD. Now, HOT didn't make a PAF-type at the time, and, I didn't have the guitar or any resistance readings with me, but he said he'd see what he could do.

Several days later a package arrived and Matthew had crafted me a double-white PAF, DC resistance 7.7k, with an alnico V magnet. Somehow, he'd managed to match it perfectly with the SD and the middle position is excellent – I've gigged with it extensively since.

It seems like my pickup was part of Matthew's experiments in the development of the Tru PAF, but even then he'd clearly done his homework and had a vision for his PAF's sound – and the results are nothing short of spectacular!

Takis Koutsoumanis, via email

Unsung Heroes

Dear TGM, I was watching a program on Fleetwood Mac the other day and was appalled that it barely spent five minutes on Peter Green. It reminded me of the maxim that winners write the history – and I think that's just as true when it comes to guitar gear.

I own my share of Gibsons, Fenders, Marshalls and the like, but when I started gigging, we made do with a motley mix of affordable gear from the likes of Hofner, Burns, Kay, Watkins, Stagg, Carlsbro... They were maybe not the coolest, but they did the job and were great! I don't think my experience is unique, but when you flick through the pages of magazines, these cheap and cheerful brands have been airbrushed from history in favour of the big names and the classic designs.

Rather like a certain car show, instead of a steady stream of supercars it would be nice to occasionally see you feature something we actually used to drive when we were young instead!

DE Siddon, via email

***TGM** History is indeed written by the victors, and in that regard the lesser-known brands that many of us made do with in our youth have fallen by the wayside. The truth of the matter is probably that, rather like getting in an old Ford Cortina today, while you might initially enjoy the nostalgic rush of getting behind the wheel, after a few miles you'd probably miss the comfort of your modern Mondeo. That said, we do try to cover small builders and pick out unsung gems that offer quality and tone as well as nostalgia – the WEM Westminster we looked at in Vintage Bench Test in November 2017 being a textbook example of an affordable vintage tone machine.*

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New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Jimi Hendrix
BOTH SIDES OF THE SKY

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

In the two years before his death in September 1970, Jimi Hendrix was in a transitional period in terms of his musical direction and was restlessly searching for a way to move forward. He committed a wealth of jams, demos, versions of complete songs and exploratory studio fragments to tape during this phase, and since 2010, Jimi's sister Janie and producers John McDermott and Eddie Kramer have presided over a trilogy of releases collecting the best of the unreleased tracks remaining in the vault. *Both Sides Of The Sky* presents 13 recordings made between 1968 an 1970, 10 of which are previously unreleased, and completes the trilogy begun with *Valleys Of Neptune* and *People, Hell And Angels*.

While many of the tracks were laid down with the minimal rhythm section of Billy Cox and Buddy Miles – Jimi's Band Of Gypsys – behind him, a range of cameo appearances make *Both Sides Of The Sky* a more rounded exploration of the evolution of Hendrix's music. *Mannish Boy*, taken from the first recording session with Cox and Miles in April 1969, is a funky, up-tempo reworking replete with scat singing that captures Jimi on lightning form. From December the same year, *Lover Man* brings an insane energy to a Hendrix favourite, cheekily incorporating the *Batman* theme tune and an incredible mix of improvised rhythm-and-lead guitar that recalls the incendiary performance of *Rock Me Baby* at Monterey.

There's also place for a slow-burning version of live staple *Hear My Train-A Comin'*, which sees Jimi's killer guitar sound screaming through his effects arsenal, with spectacular use of cocked-wah vocalisations and howling string bends. Elsewhere, a '69 session with Stephen Stills yields a pre-CSNY version of Joni Mitchell's *Woodstock* and the enjoyable *$20 Fine*, with Jimi backed by Stills' organ and Duane Hitchings on piano.

On *Things I Used To Do*, Johnny Winter jams with Hendrix, Cox and Dallas Taylor and its fascinating interplay gets your fingers twitching. Elsewhere, the slick production of *Power Of Soul* offers a glimpse into one of Jimi's many possible futures. *Both Sides Of The Sky* is likely to be the last word from the Hendrix archives, but it's a fitting testament to Jimi as not just the greatest guitar player ever, but also to a man determined to fuse styles to create an exciting, pathfinding musical form.

Clint Moon

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *The Yardbirds, Cream, Stevie Ray Vaughan*

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Graham Coxon
THE END OF THE F***ING WORLD

Blur guitarist Coxon has turned his hand to a variety of musical projects over the years, but his soundtrack to Channel 4's acclaimed pitch black comedy *The End Of The F***king World* is his first attempt at scoring for TV. He's clearly got the knack, as this companion album nails the dissonance of the show's Americana-meets-suburban-England aesthetic – blending folky acoustic ballads with retro-vibed surfy instrumentals. The 'songs' will probably get more attention, and there's something charming about the contrast of *Walking All Day*'s jaunty acoustic slide with its darkly comic lyrics. But the mainly instrumental numbers are where Coxon really shines. *Bus Stop* sees him set his axe to jangle as he channels Marr and Robert Smith, while the stomping *On The Prowl* descends into wonderfully scuzzy guitar cacophony. *The Snare*, on the other hand, is a Little Barrie-esque slice of Americana that crescendos into thumping alt-rock brilliance. This is the most compelling thing Coxon has created in ages, and one of the most listenable soundtracks of the year. **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Little Barrie, Ry Cooder, Blur*

Marmozets
KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW NOW

Four years on from Marmozets' eclectic debut, the follow up has a more focused approach. Lead single *Play* is the most direct and radio-friendly track on the record, with the guitars of Jack Bottomley and Sam Macintyre having an early 2000s Foo Fighters vibe – not surprising given that Gil Norton (Pixies, Foo Fighters) is behind the desk. *Habits* is classic Marmozets – Becca Macintyre's searing vocals lead throughout, hoisted up by the driving power of Bottomley's Alpher Instruments signature into a Silvertone 1484. Macintyre's trademark yelps and stunning vocal stretches are a constant throughout – setting her, and the band, apart from the crowd. *Insomnia* sounds like Blur being fronted by Ellie Rowsell, with the guitars taking on a more retro vibe – no doubt in part due to Macintyre's baritone Jazzmaster. Ultimately, *Knowing What You Know Now* is a restless offering, and for every Radio 1-ready chorus and playful riff there's an unexpected tangent. It's not a safe album, but its eccentricity is its strength. **SR**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Paramore, Arcane Roots*

Myles Kennedy
YEAR OF THE TIGER

You probably know Myles Kennedy as the frontman of US hard-rockers Alter Bridge, or from lending his considerable pipes to Slash's band, but his debut solo record sees the singer/guitarist dive deep into the Americana that's always inspired him. Kennedy's guitar playing has often been in the considerable shadow of Mark Tremonti in Alter Bridge, but *Year Of The Tiger* – a concept record that deals with the death of his father – sees him playing acoustic, electric, mandolin and lap-steel with considerable aplomb. The sheer force and range of Kennedy's vocals mean that a when things get loud the songs lean toward the power end of the ballad spectrum, but it's on the tracks that break out of that mould – such as the hip-shaking boogie of *Devil On The Wall* or the delicately picked country-tinged *Haunted By Design* – that really stand out. For fans of his rockier work, this is a chance to appreciate what a talented all-round musician Kennedy is, but there's plenty to enjoy for general Americana fans, too. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Alter Bridge, Chuck Ragan*

Don Broco
TECHNOLOGY

Bedford rockers Don Broco have been accused of writing songs solely for live shows in the past, but given that they recently sold out Alexandra Palace, it's not been in vain. *Technology* then, should be an album that cements Don Broco as a festival headliner, but it doesn't. Instead, it's an album that feels formulaic – full of burly riffs and pounding breakdowns all right, but the lyrics feel tacked on and lazy. In spite of this, both frontman Rob Damiani and drummer Matt Donnelly deliver strong vocal performances, while equally impactful is the vicious riffery of guitarist Simon Delaney – his exuberant and kinetic style bringing to mind early Lower Than Atlantis and Reuben. It's not an album devoid of great songs, either. *Tightrope* and *Greatness* are reminiscent of Broco on top form, while *Everybody* is one of their best songs yet. On the whole, however, *Technology* compromises consistency in favour of songs that will elevate the carnage at live shows, resulting in a frustrating mix of Broco's best and worst. **SR**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Lower Than Atlantis, Proceed, Reuben*

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BEST IN SHOW

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Although Gibson was conspicuous by its absence from the musical instrument industry's annual shindig in Anaheim, California, there was still plenty to write home about. Last month we went in-depth with Fender's new flagship American Original line and Taylor's innovative V-Class bracing, but here we focus on the best of the rest in our show highlights...

Photography **Joe Supple, Chris Vinnicombe & Sam Roberts**

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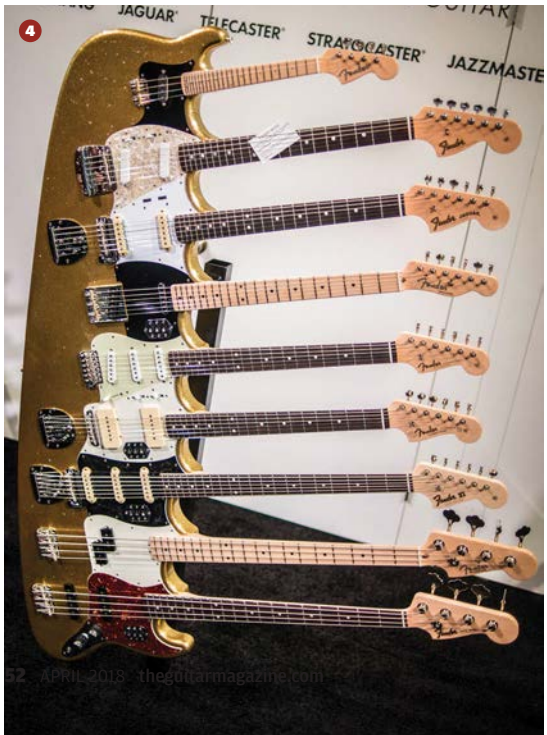
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1 Fender's Parallel Universe Collection Tele Thinline Super Deluxe 2 Master Builder Yuriy Shiskov's Pinball Telecaster 3 Jimmie Vaughan was on hand to introduce the John Cruz limited edition 30th Anniversary Vaughan Brothers Stratocaster set 4 Master Builder Paul Waller's incredible Prestige 9-Neck featuring nine popular pre-CBS models and scales 5 Fender's 60th Anniversary Triple Jazzmaster in Daphne Blue with Tim Shaw designed custom humbuckers with Filter'Tron covers 6 Fender's Parallel Universe Collection Meteora 7 Gretsch Limited Edition G6118T-135 Anniversary in Dark Cherry Metallic and Casino Gold 8 Gretsch G5520 Electromatic Jet BT Single-Cut with 'V' stoptail

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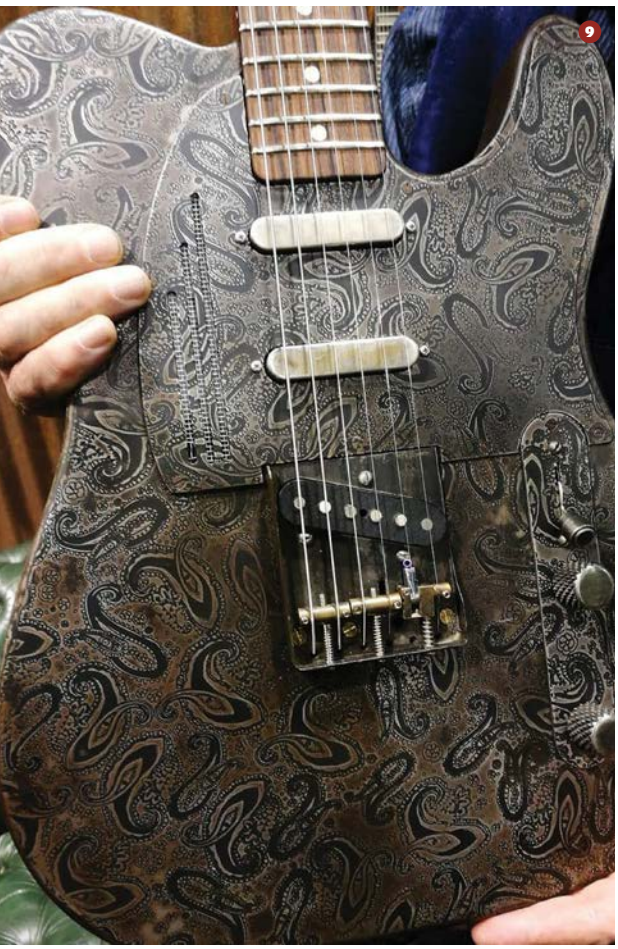

9 James Trussart's Paisley Steelcaster with Joe Glaser B-Bender **10** A one-of-a-kind Revstar from Yamaha's USA Custom Shop **11** Charvel's Satchel Signature Pro-Mod DK in its subtly understated Yellow Bengal finish **12** New Arcade models from Canadian luthiers Frank Brothers **13** Friedman's Metro D single-cut **14** Supro's David Bowie Limited Edition Dual Tone based on the main guitar Bowie played on the *Reality* album and throughout his final world tour **15** An array of new models were on display at the Eastman booth including the SB56/n-GD featuring Lollar custom aged soapbar P-90 pickups and the company's Vintage Nitro finish, the compact T184MX-GB 14-inch thinline and the SB59/v-GB in gorgeous Antique Goldburst

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16 ZVex's Vertical Vexter Series makes its most popular models easier on pedalboards 17 Godin's Montreal Premiere in Desert Green with Duncan P-Rails and the Dorchester Bass 18 Guild's Jetstar reissue in Vintage White, Black and Sea Foam Green 19 Line 6's HX Effects unit packs over 100 effects into a pedalboard-friendly footprint 20 Fender's new Marine Layer Reverb, Mirror Image Delay, Pugilist Distortion, The Bends Compressor, Santa Ana Overdrive and Level Set Buffer 21 The Darkglass Alpha Omega Ultra bass preamp pedal 22 An eye-catching Vigier Rock Art 7-string 23 Wire Instruments Supercollider 24 Rob Chapman introduces Chapman Guitars' new British Standard Series 25 Neil Young's '72 Marshall on the Koll stand 26 Rock N Roll Relics Lightning

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27 The Harmony brand returns in Summer 2018 with new amplifier and guitar designs courtesy of BandLab Technologies 28 Orange's Technical Director Ade Emsley with the Brent Hinds Terror, reviewed on p94 29 Marshall's new Origin Series promises vintage valve tones and power reduction technology at an affordable price point 30 A strong contender for our 'best in show', Universal Audio's OX Amp Top Box is a premium reactive load box and guitar recording system 31 As well as limited edition blonde cosmetics on several of its guitar amplifiers, Blackstar launched its impressive Unity Pro bass amp range 32 Friedman's BE-50 Deluxe 33 EVH's compact 5150III 50W 6L6 head, available in Black or Ivory textured vinyl

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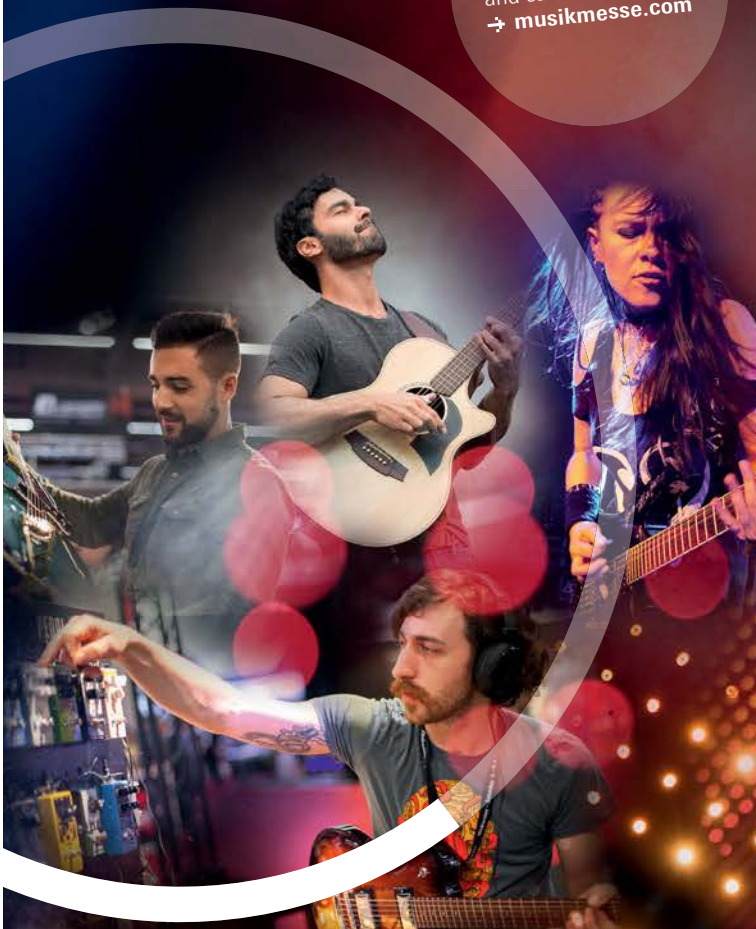

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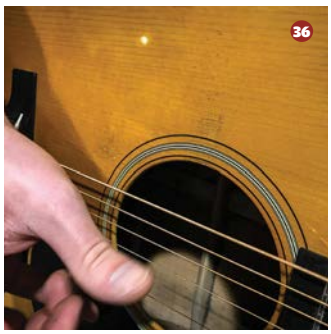
34 Beach Boys guitarist Jeffrey Foskett with his Italia signature JF-'Q' and the Maranello Intero with 'No Cutaway' body, spruce top, chambered mahogany body, ITV-5 humbucker and piezo pickup **35** As well as showcasing some incredible woodworking on its acoustic line, 40 years on from when George Lowden first built an electric guitar Lowden unveiled the GL-10 electric in Anaheim – review soon! **36** One of the highlights of the Martin stand was the company's range of exquisitely aged Authentic Series guitars based on iconic pre-war models **37** The Art & Lutherie Roadhouse in Denim Blue with top-mounted volume and tone controls **38** Faith Guitars showcased excellent new Nexus, Naked and PJE Legacy Series acoustics at the show – despite noise pollution from a nearby conga exhibit!



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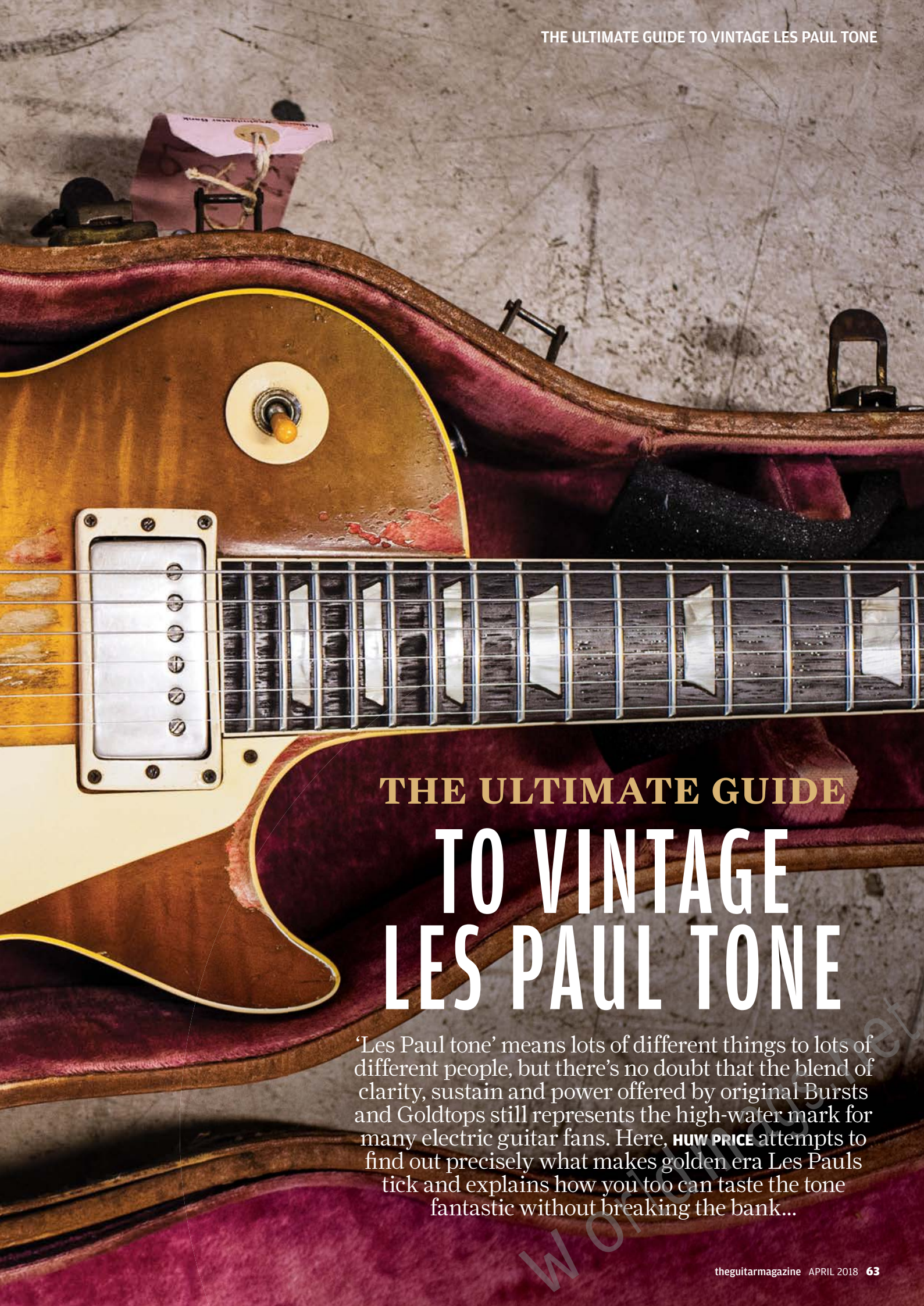

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

TO VINTAGE LES PAUL TONE

'Les Paul tone' means lots of different things to lots of different people, but there's no doubt that the blend of clarity, sustain and power offered by original Bursts and Goldtops still represents the high-water mark for many electric guitar fans. Here, **HUW PRICE** attempts to find out precisely what makes golden era Les Pauls tick and explains how you too can taste the tone fantastic without breaking the bank...

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Our three test bed guitars – a Gibson Custom Collector's Choice #26 Whitford Burst, our work-in-progress Greco conversion and a 1954 Goldtop

In last month's in-depth look at the 1960 Les Paul Standard formerly owned by Doug Lock and Luther Grosvenor, we made the bold claim that anyone can enjoy something unnervingly close to vintage Les Paul tone by combining the right pickups, hardware and electronics with a suitable body.

We also promised to expand on the theme and that's precisely what follows across the next 10 pages. In short, armed with an original 1954 Goldtop, a Gibson Custom Collector's Choice #26 Whitford Burst and our work-in-progress Greco Goldtop conversion (which you can read more about on p111), we've compiled a step-by-step guide to achieving vintage Les Paul tone without having to sell your house in the process.

If you are shooting for 1950s Les Paul tone, we think that success is more likely if you consider things as a whole rather than obsess over specific details. The electric guitar is a 'system' and, as with all systems, individual components interact. Identifying the key components and gaining insight into how they work together is essential. Read on for an analysis of what we consider to be the key components, the way they effect tone and what your options are.

Hardware

A significant proportion of vintage Les Pauls were retrofitted with Grover or Schaller machineheads at some point – many have since been converted back to Klusons. The balance of the guitar changes with heavier tuners and you may notice changes in transient attack, but it's hardly a make or break issue. The same can be said for nylon nuts and if you do notice sonic differences compared to bone or other materials, you'll only hear them when you play open strings.

Consequently, attention focuses on bridges and tailpieces and we conduct our primary listening tests with the guitars unplugged. We've always found vintage Gibsons a bit softer in the treble and woodier in the mids than even the best reissues. With the electrics eliminated, these differences can only be attributed to the wood, the bridges and tailpieces or a combination of both.

We test the hypothesis by swapping the original wrapover tailpiece and studs from the 1954 Goldtop onto our Greco and putting the Greco's Faber aluminium tailpiece onto the Gibson. The strings on both guitars are identical sets of Ernie Ball Pure Nickel 0.010s.

The results are clear, with the Greco now sounding like a vintage Gibson and the Gibson taking on the snap, brightness and chime of the Greco. Many would regard the sonic characteristics of the Faber tailpiece as superior, but it's less 'vintage' and vocal sounding, and it doesn't sustain quite so well.

We swap the original wrapover tailpiece and studs from the 1954 Goldtop onto our Greco, and the Greco now sounds like a vintage Gibson

Moving over to the Collector's Choice LP, we swap the bridge for an ABR-1 taken from a 1961 ES-330. The changes are less dramatic, but still clearly audible. We hear a softening of the treble, which leads to a more vocal midrange and a compressed warmth. The Collector's Choice model's owner declares that the vintage ABR-1 has "taken the newness off

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the guitar", and promptly begins scouring the net for vintage bridges.

Since both wrapover bridges are aluminium, we must conclude that the grade of aluminium being used by Faber differs from the aluminium Gibson was using during the 1950s. Research suggests vintage ABR-1 bridges were cast from an alloy called zamak – containing zinc, aluminium, magnesium, and copper – and there are eight grades of zamak. Collector's choice bridges are describes as 'zinc', but again we suspect the composition may be slightly different.

Vintage PAFs and P-90s (and accurate replicas) tend to be very microphonic so many of the guitar's unplugged tonal characteristics make it to the amp, and they have treble to spare. Therefore, hardware is an important factor in the Les Paul tone equation, and your options are to buy vintage parts or find replacements that sound like vintage ones. This area could benefit from more research.

With the 50s wrapover bridge installed, our Greco project sounds remarkably like a 50s Les Paul

Once the vintage ABR-1 is in situ in our CC Les Paul, the tonal differences are clearly audible

Potentiometers

Saying that vintage Les Paul controls 'just work' would be a touch simplistic, so let's be specific. Assuming they're functioning correctly, vintage Les Pauls have controls you can use to achieve a huge range of tones without ever touching your amp or a pedal. Check out archive footage of Paul Kossoff or any number of Joe Bonamassa instructional videos and you'll get the idea.

Bonamassa explicitly states, "What people don't realise about old Gibsons is a significant part of the sound is not in the pickups, but in the pots". He attributes a "nice clean, clear open sound" to the smooth taper of vintage pots working with lower output pickups and military-grade wire and capacitors.

You can buy vintage 500k Centralab pots on Reverb and so forth, but they tend to be highly priced and there's no guarantee that they'll be working properly. Most suppliers stock 500k replacement pots for Gibsons, but what's the best option if you want to get close to vintage spec without buying vintage?

To find out, we're measuring a selection of popular replacement potentiometers. This involves taking the actual value of the potentiometers and then plotting their tapers on graph paper based on resistance readings taken at 10 intervals corresponding to the markings on a Les Paul control knob.

For comparison purposes, readings are taken from all four potentiometers in the 1954 Goldtop we've borrowed for this feature. The actual resistance values vary from a low of 462k to a high of 600k with an average of 537.5k. All four vintage pots also read between 1k and 2k with the control knobs set to one and they are all logarithmic rather than linear.

We average out the readings from the four vintage pots and draw a response curve (see p66). A graph is also drawn for each of the replacement potentiometers, so they

POT RESISTANCE VALUES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
BOURNS SHORT	0k	14k	24k	36k	46k	140k	253k	365k	480k	480k
BOURNS LONG	6k	17k	28k	39k	49k	148k	276k	406k	533k	542k
BARE KNUCKLE 1	0k	10k	24k	35k	49k	74k	163k	328k	490k	533k
BARE KNUCKLE 2	0k	9k	24k	40k	54k	81k	155k	304k	466k	509k
ALPHA	4k	12k	19k	38k	55k	73k	207k	334k	460k	488k
CTS AUDIO	0k	4k	17k	29k	43k	59k	98k	257k	423k	508k
CTS VINTAGE	0k	17k	33k	49k	66k	96k	168k	303k	431k	488k
'54 LP V1	1k	10k	26k	38k	50k	78k	172k	305k	460k	493k
'54 LP V2	1k	7k	20k	33k	45k	64k	154k	300k	497k	600k
'54 LP T1	1k	9k	23k	34k	45k	83k	208k	366k	545k	595k
'54 LP T2	2k	10k	24k	38k	48k	74k	182k	323k	458k	462k
'54 LP AVERAGE	1.25k	9k	23.25k	35.75k	47k	74.25k	179k	325.5k	490k	537.5k

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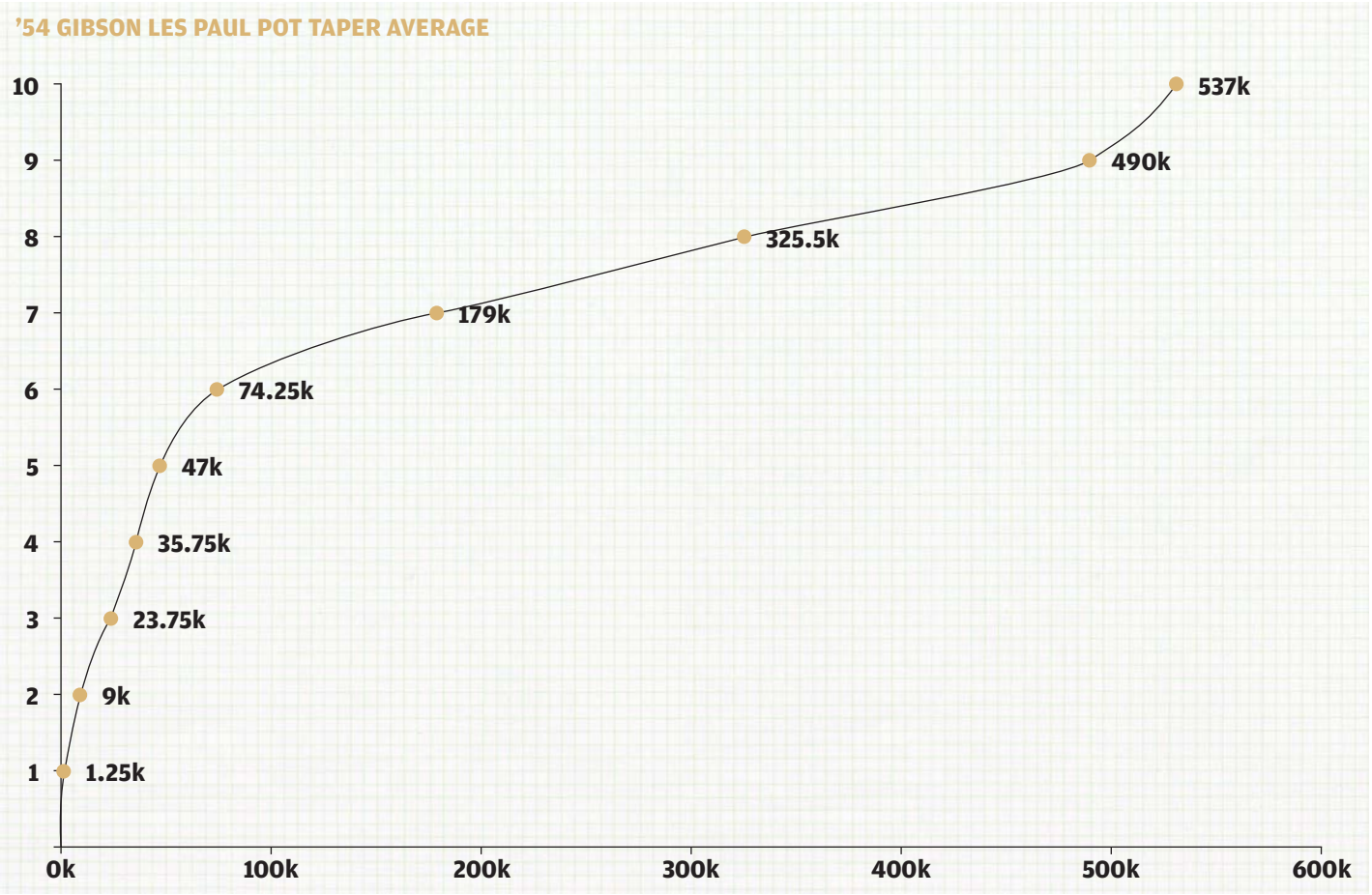

can be individually placed over the vintage potentiometer graph to provide a visual indication of how closely the resistance readings and tapers match.

Smokin' Pots

CTS AUDIO This is the most commonly used replacement potentiometer and it's fitted in many high-end guitars. The actual resistance value is 508k and resistance remains significantly lower until five, whereupon it conforms to the vintage curve until three before drifting lower. If you're looking for vintage response, this potentiometer is possibly the least authentic choice.

ALPHA 500K Considering it's a cheaper option, the Alpha pot does a lot better than the CTS Audio. It still shows some resistance at one and although resistance drifts very slightly above and below the vintage average, the taper shape actually conforms closely to the vintage taper. The actual resistance is 488k, which is higher than the lowest vintage pot reading, and it has a nice smooth feel.

CTS VINTAGE TAPER This pot certainly gets closer to the vintage average than the regular CTS Audio pot and it's very close from seven to eight and one to four. But the taper is very different between four and seven, where the CTS is noticeably higher in resistance, and between eight and 10 where it is lower. Pot resistance is 488k.

BOURNS LONG SHAFT With an actual value of 540k, this one starts well, but things quickly veer off course. Between 10 and nine, resistance hardly changes, then the taper follows the vintage line, albeit at a higher resistance, until it joins the curve at five and remains quite close from five to one. With its long shaft, this pot might suit Les Pauls with thicker tops and some will like the loose feel.

BOURNS SHORT SHAFT This is fairly similar to the long shaft version but there is even less of a resistance change between 10 and nine. From there the resistance decrease is very linear and consistently higher than vintage average until the lines meet up at five and follow closely to one.

If you're looking for vintage response, the trusty CTS Audio 500k potentiometer is possibly the least authentic choice

BARE KNUCKLE CTS 550K These pots have long shafts and a plus or minus 10 per cent tolerance, which makes them bang on for the vintage range we measured. Testing two of these, we get measurements of 509k and 533k. Comparing the graphs, the 509k pot moves slightly above and below the vintage curve between five and eight, but otherwise stays close. The 533k pot is an almost perfect match for our vintage average from one to 10.

The clear winner is the 533k Bare Knuckle with the Alpha a very close runner up. If you order a set of Bare Knuckle pots, we'd suggest measuring across the outer lugs to determine the actual resistance values. If you want a bit more brightness, use the higher value pots as volume controls and use the others for tone.

Alpha pots cost around £2 each, so they're a bit of a bargain compared to the £9.95 Bare Knuckles. The closed-back casings will also look more vintage correct, so long as you disguise the markings by soldering the ground wires over the top. However, the shaft is narrower than a CTS, so you may need a couple of wider washers to clamp it in place if you're fitting Alphas in USA-made guitars.

Measuring just 10mm, the short shaft means the Alpha pots we tested should be fine in SGs, Juniors, Vs and so forth, but cannot be installed in some Les Paul-type guitars. Long shaft versions are available from Axesrus, but we can't vouch for the taper at the time of writing.

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Our time spent with the Duggie Lock Les Paul was illuminating from a tonal perspective

If you like to use your guitar controls for tone shaping, or think you might enjoy learning to do so, a pot change is recommended. If you have no intention of using your controls below the 10 setting, don't bother changing a thing.

Capacitors

Vintage Les Paul enthusiasts can get pretty obsessive about tone capacitors and serious money changes hands for original – and sometimes not so original – Bumble Bees. These were the Sprague-manufactured capacitors Gibson used during the late 50s.

However not all Bumble Bees were created equal, and although it's widely assumed they were paper/oil types, the manufacturing process changed and many are more modern-style Mylar capacitors. You can tell the difference because the oil-filled versions have a filler cap protruding from one end with the leadout wire soldered into it. At the other end, the wire goes straight into the capacitor body.

We have no intention of getting into the oil versus Mylar debate, but it is worth pointing out that many of the 'holy grail' Bursts left the factory with Mylar capacitors and that's the sound you can hear on countless classic records. The Astron capacitors that Gibson started using in 1960 are lesser known, but we recently encountered them in the early 1960 Duggie Lock Burst.

Research suggests these are metal foil capacitors in ceramic tubes. While Burst obsessives are busy chasing bees, you can find old Astrons like the ones in the 1960 LP for less than £10. Sometimes they were branded Lafayette and those tend to be even cheaper.

While Burst obsessives are busy chasing Bumble Bee capacitors, you can find old Astrons like the ones in the 1960 Les Paul for less than £10

It's worth noting that most old capacitors will have drifted far away from their stated value. It's safe to assume this is true of many of the caps that have resided undisturbed in vintage Les Pauls for decades, so if a cap no longer reads close to vintage spec 0.022uF, it may not matter. In fact, it could be beneficial.

While measuring pots is a valid exercise, capacitor choice is more subjective. Instead we gather a small selection of vintage and NOS capacitors and conduct some blind tests. The capacitors are wired to a rotary switch and hooked up to our Collector's Choice model fitted with Monty's PAF replicas. During testing they are identified only by number and we make notes during the testing process.

If The Cap Fits

SPRAGUE HYREL 'VITAMIN Q' This NOS cap is supposedly a paper/oil type and since it's only rated at 200 volts, it's relatively small. We find moderate roll off quite clear and vocal with a wah-like narrow 'Q' and a hint of vintage quackiness. Things start getting a bit muffled around 4.5 and with the tone control rolled fully back, the lows get woofy. This is a nice-sounding capacitor that measures bang on 0.022uF, but the tone control's usable range becomes limited with this in circuit.

ASTRON/LAFAYETTE NO 1 The multimeter reveals that this cap has drifted from the stated 0.03uF up to 0.084uF. Even so, the

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guitar retains brightness and with the tone rolled back to half way, note definition is better than the Hyrel. However, the dynamics feel a bit compressed and with a slight loss of sparkle combined with some graininess in the upper mids, we find that this capacitor obliges you to play harder to sound good.

ASTRON/LAFAYETTE NO 2 This has drifted even more and reads 0.23uF. Even so, the guitar sounds clear and feels like it has a slightly higher output. There is a quacky wah quality, but the Q is less pronounced than with the Hyrel. We also find the wah effect changes with playing dynamics – becoming more apparent as you play harder. With the tone fully up the guitar is chimey and smooth, and when rolled back low string definition is retained because the very lowest frequencies are attenuated along with the treble.

SPRAGUE BUMBLE BEE This was advertised as an NOS Bumble Bee and it appears to be a paper/oil type. As expected, the value has drifted upwards – to 0.036uF in this case. Again, the guitar sounds loud with this cap and there's a nice sparkle in the treble. The downside is a push in the low mids that adds a touch of muddiness, but it's a decent sounding capacitor that retains detail.

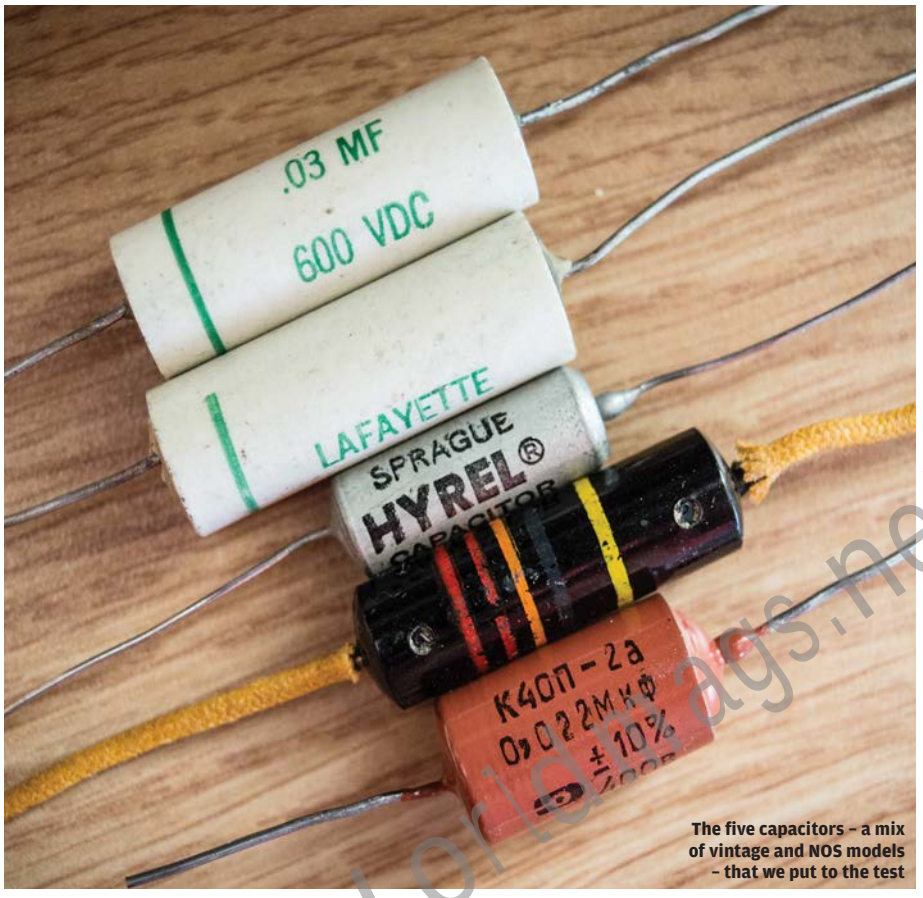
RUSSIAN K40N PAPER/OIL These chubby red caps have been long time *TGM* favourites and it doesn't disappoint here. Reading 0.023uF, words like plummy, rounded, smoky and balanced spring to mind. With the tone on 10 there's sparkle aplenty, and when you roll back you get a sax-like honk that continues to a smooth jazziness. It may not the best choice if you like your Lesters aggressive, but it's a great cap if you prefer a touch of refinement.

It's hard to say which capacitor produces the most authentically vintage results – or indeed if that's the most desirable and usable outcome anyway. The differences don't really jump out at you and we find it takes a period of careful listening and experimentation to zone in on what each capacitor does.

Even so, we do have a favourite: the 0.23uF Astron/Lafayette – the capacitor that is furthest away from vintage spec. Loaded in the Collector's Choice with a full set of Alpha pots, the volume and tone controls become wildly interactive and when the volume is around five, rolling back the tone introduces a mid-scoop that actually enhances clarity. The centre frequency even appears to change slightly depending on the volume and tone settings. So, the tone acts as both a treble roll-off and a rudimentary parametric equalizer – depending on how the controls are set.

If you listen carefully you can hear this with regular 500k pots and 0.022uF caps, but we suspect an upwards drift in actual cap value might accentuate the effect.

An Astron/Lafayette cap installed in the Collector's Choice Les Paul



The five capacitors – a mix of vintage and NOS models – that we put to the test

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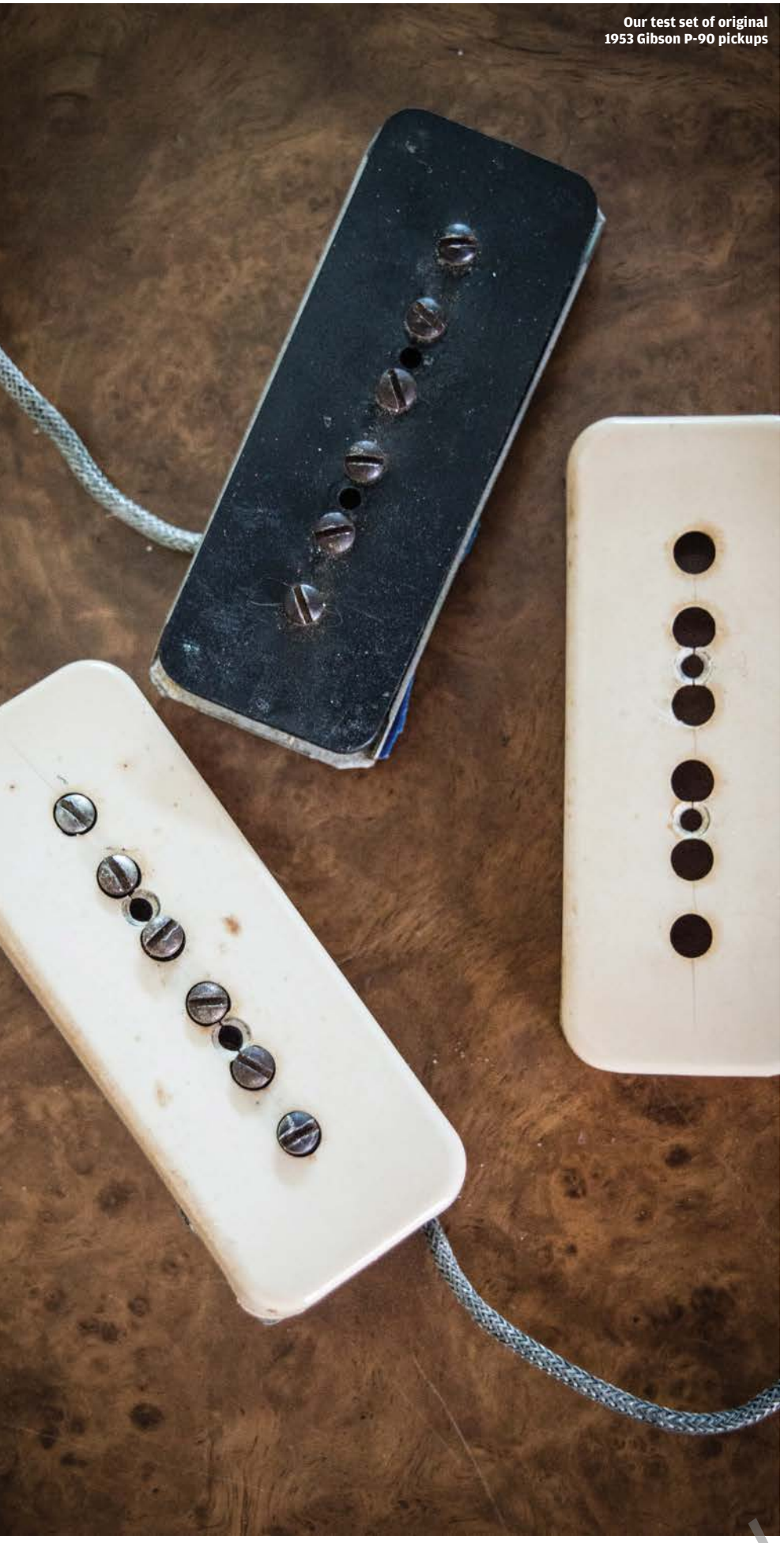

Our test set of original 1953 Gibson P-90 pickups

Pickups

This is the big one, and if you get the right type of pickups in your Les Paul it can have a very profound effect. At the very least your P-90 or PAF replicas will need to have suitable alnico magnets, steel parts with low carbon content, plain enamel magnet wire and no wax potting. In the case of PAF replicas, the coils will be slightly mismatched.

If you can get those bases covered, you may wish to research the tones associated with different grades of alnico and decide whether you want early-style P-90s with A3 or late 50s-style with A5. Also research the range of DC resistance readings of vintage pickups and consider how that will impact tone.

If you're ordering from a boutique maker, you can no doubt discuss your requirements and allow the experts to guide you. For this feature we're actually more concerned with getting the best from your pickups rather than identifying the 'best' pickups per se.

An old pro-audio old adage says the best microphone in the world is the one you have. What it means is that so long as a mic is of a certain standard, great results can be achieved by applying technique and ingenuity.

If the sound is too bright, you move the mic to somewhere where the sound is a little darker. If you need more treble you can do the opposite, and you can balance the low frequency content by altering the proximity of the mic to the instrument being recorded. So how does this relate to pickups?

Adjusting PAFs

Although the scope for adjustment is physically restricted, adjusting pickups is very much akin to placing microphones. This is particularly true with microphonic vintage-style pickups like PAFs and P-90s, because they are extremely sensitive to height settings.

There's no point in throwing in endless sets of high-quality pickups in an aimless search for a specific sound. Unless you take the time to zone in on the optimum settings for a particular set, you may never hear the pickups at their best, or discover the full range of tones and textures they're capable of.

The only tools needed are your ears and a screwdriver. With the pickups set low relative to the strings, you get a darker and more mellow tone but it may lack bite, aggression and output. Moving the pickup closer to the string will increase output and make the tone brighter. Lift it higher still and you'll get more bite and aggression, but the tone can get become too edgy and shouty, plus the pickup's magnetism may dampen string vibration and reduce sustain.

We take our time getting the bridge just right, always shooting for an even string-to-string balance from bass to treble. We follow the same procedure for the neck pickup, but it's slightly complicated by the need to balance the neck to the bridge pickup. You may notice

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The Duggie Lock Burst's pickups were set low, but the pole screws were jacked up

that low strings lose definition if the neck pickup is set too low. When both pickups are perfectly balanced, the middle setting's voice will be noticeably distinct.

We were perfectly happy with this procedure until the Duggie Lock Burst came along and opened our eyes to other possibilities. We soon noticed the bridge pickup was set far lower than usual, but the pole screws were jacked high above the covers to compensate. The bridge sounded almost like a P-90, combining a thick midrange roar with tremendous clarity and soft treble.

Trying this approach with our own Monty's loaded Greco LP Standard copy, we were astonished to discover how close we could get to the tone. All the action happens in the midrange and once you get the hang of balancing pickup and pole screw heights, you can shift the midrange tonal characteristic and almost re-voice a pickup to your taste.

By taking the more traditional approach to the neck pickup, you can swing it so the neck is just as bright, or even brighter than the bridge. A fantastic tonal contrast can be achieved, and the middle setting will also now have an audible phasiness with slightly hollow mids for a great third tonal option. And if you don't want to go down that route, contrary to what some people might claim, the pole screws can still be used to even up string-to-string balance.

Unless you take the time to zone in on the optimum settings for a particular set, you may never hear the pickups at their best

Adjusting P-90s

Attention turns to P-90s and we count ourselves lucky to have a genuine 1953 set to test in our Greco. Cutting to the chase, the Greco conversion with vintage P-90s installed sounds virtually indistinguishable from the bona fide 1954 Gibson Goldtop. This mirrors our findings when we installed a set of vintage PAFs in a Greco in the past.

The set-up procedures we discussed in relation to PAFs also apply to P-90s, however adjusting height can be tricky. Some use foam rubber for its springiness, but we prefer wood shims. There is another set-up trick you can try to alter P-90 voicing.

Years ago a prominent pickup builder explained to us how the two magnets in P-90s are arranged to repel rather than attract. Over the decades, this can actually cause the magnets to move apart, and this changes the shape of the magnetic field.

It's the simplest mod to try with both vintage and repro pickups. Slacken off the baseplate screws very slightly until the magnets will slide with a little bit of encouragement. Try moving them a millimetre or so at a time and you may hear how the beefy midrange roar begins to take on a vintage quackiness.

You can try this on just one pickup to achieve tonal contrast, or both if you like the effect. It costs nothing and so long and you note the starting points, the magnets can be returned to their original positions.

Old or new pickups?

If you only take one thing away from reading this article, it should be that dropping

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genuine vintage pickups into a decent quality reissue or copy will get you closer to the actual sound of a vintage Les Paul than buying a top dollar Gibson Custom or custom-built replica instrument that comes equipped with factory-made pickups.

Prices for vintage PAFs have skyrocketed and you need to be careful because some replicas are scarily indistinguishable from real ones and sadly, there are a few dishonest sellers out there. But even if you are prepared to pay around £4,000 for a vintage set, you'd still have a grand or so's worth of change to play with before you start getting into the price range of even the cheapest second-hand Collector's Choice Gibsons.

At the time of writing, there were three 1950s P-90s on Reverb for between £330 and £360 each. Granted this isn't cheap compared to even the best replicas, but as a magic bullet solution for vintage Les Paul tone, a set of vintage P-90s may end up saving you a lot of effort, time and money. You could even buy one at a time as funds allow.

Verdict

Although a range of factors interact to produce vintage style Les Paul tone and controllability, our test results suggest some are more influential than others. Everything we have learned so far about vintage Les Pauls leads us to conclude that the pickups are the most important factor and the wood is possibly the least of it.

Of course the wood matters, but so long as your Les Paul has a non-chambered mahogany body with a solid maple cap, a rosewood fingerboard and a glued in mahogany neck, the fundamentals are in place. We'd probably argue that a long tenon neck joint and a fully loaded weight of somewhere between 8.2lbs and 10lbs are desirable features, too.

We've reached this conclusion through experimentation. Having had the opportunity to load vintage P-90s and PAFs into a couple of 80s Grecos, there's no denying that copies can sound almost exactly like the real thing.

Everything we've learned about vintage Les Pauls leads us to conclude that the pickups are the most important factor and the wood is possibly the least

When vintage Gibson hardware is installed, too, the results are truly staggering. Sadly vintage hardware has become very expensive, but if you can afford a piece here or there, you will hear a difference. In the meantime, we'll continue our investigations in the hope of finding repro hardware with authentically vintage tonal characteristics.

Let's be clear about potentiometers. If you increase the pot's resistance by 10k or even 100k you will get a bit of extra brightness. However, it's not a massive change and the most crucial factor is the way they respond. We have established that modern pots with vintage accurate tapers are available and they are affordable.

Capacitor choice has an even more subtle effect and only those with keen hearing will detect a difference. It's quick and easy to install a bunch of capacitors on a rotary switch to audition them. Just pick the ones that sound good to you. All the vintage ones will have drifted so far out of spec, it would be misleading if we told you to buy a specific type or value.

The majority of us will never be able to afford a genuine 50s Les Paul and it's all too easy to spend our time gazing wistfully at vintage pictures, reading every article and hanging out on forums. By and large, these activities merely serve to make things worse.

Alternatively, you can get proactive about it. We hope we've demonstrated that not having a spare £220K in the bank doesn't disqualify you from enjoying vintage Les Paul tone. Get creative, be prepared to compromise and you may find yourself very pleasantly surprised with the results.

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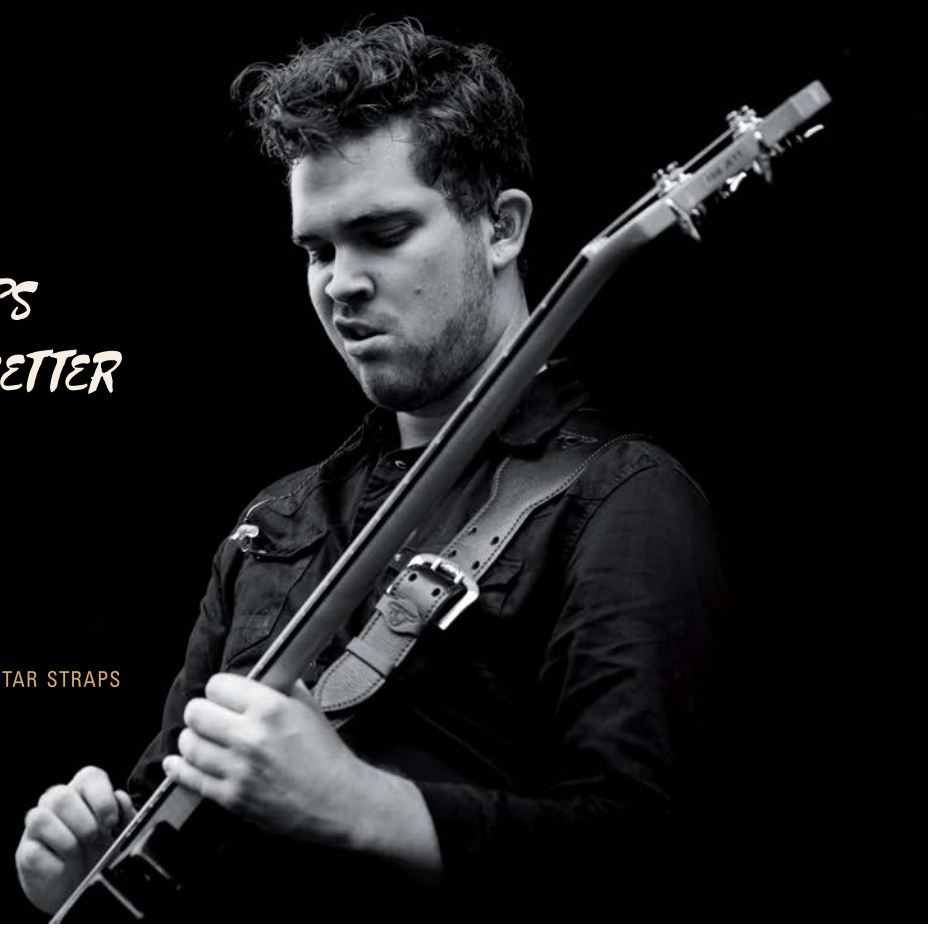

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SOUL'S OUT

Teacher turned acclaimed rock 'n' roller JD McPherson tells **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** all about recording within the hallowed walls of Nashville's RCA Studio B, jamming with Queens Of The Stone Age and a close encounter with a legendary bluesman's guitar courtesy of Dan Auerbach...

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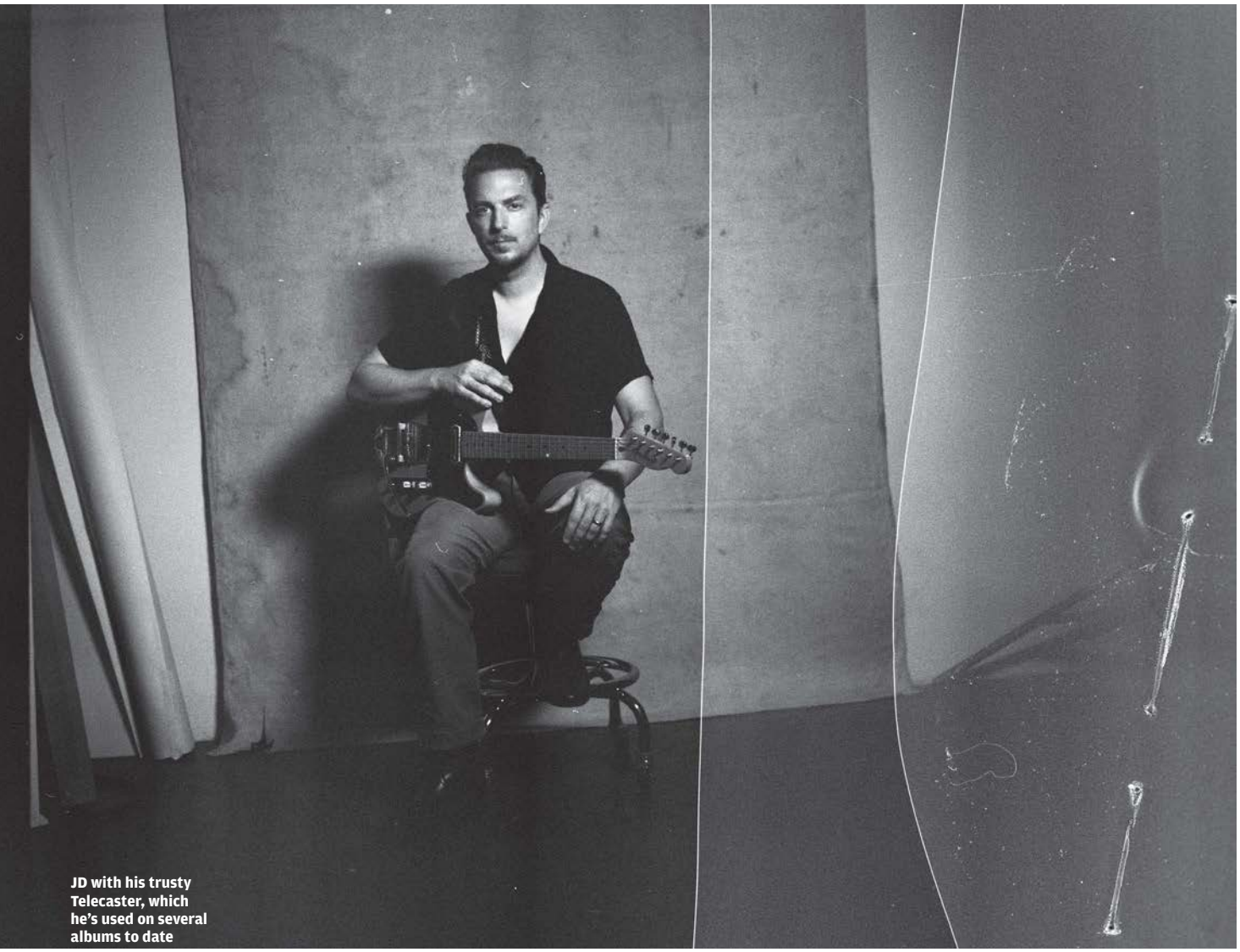

JD with his trusty Telecaster, which he's used on several albums to date

"It's strange because fear drives the creative process and impedes it. It's like gas and brakes." For JD McPherson, the path that led to his third album, *Undivided Heart & Soul*, was far from smooth. The fear factor – a result of aborted recording sessions, fractious band relationships and a shortage of material – was eventually navigated but the resulting long player, recorded in Nashville's legendary RCA Studio B, saw the former art teacher from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma resist the temptation to let the studio's history dictate the sound of the record.

"You feel like you'd want to make things that sound like the Everly Brothers or Roy Orbison or the big lush Nashville sound stuff that Chet Atkins produced," he acknowledges. "But it was so funny, the longer we were there, the louder and fuzzier everything got. It was almost like that room wanted some rebellious things to happen!"

Where McPherson's early breakthroughs came via bolts of rhythm and blues lightning heavy on upright bass and 50s stylings, *Undivided Heart & Soul* shakes off the rockabilly trappings. Instead, his band channels an early 60s energy on 11 songs underpinned by electric bass and crackling with fuzzy guitars. Inspiration came courtesy of Link Wray, Brit psych-rockers The Creation and the New Orleans soul of Irma Thomas.

All that said, recording in the same space as so many landmark recordings were made did make an impact (if not quite as dramatic an impact as when Dolly Parton drove her car through the side of the building in 1967):

"It certainly had an effect psychologically and pragmatically on the sound of the record," says McPherson. "Definitely being there carried such a weight, in a wonderful way. RCA Studio B is a museum in the daytime, operated by the Country Music Hall Of Fame. So they had tours coming there all the time and what we would have to do was, we'd load in during the afternoon or evening, record all night and then load out at sometimes three, four in the morning. And that's every single day. So we were loading in and tearing down every day!

"If that had been any other studio it might have been a real drag," he admits. "But it was such a pleasure to be there. Being a rock 'n' roll fan and a country music fan, to know that all the Roy Orbison Monument stuff was done there, the early Everly Brothers stuff, the post-army Elvis stuff... it's pretty incredible. You definitely feel that. And they have a PA set up in the tracking room where they play music for the tours, so we'd load out every night and play Everly Brothers songs and you just can't believe it... wow."

> "I am so abusive to guitars. I've played Telecasters for years 'cause it's almost like Telecasters want to be beaten up"

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Museum Pieces

Aside from the sheer vibe of recording in space that's played host to so many legends, RCA Studio B is something of a treasure trove of vintage equipment. "Something that really kind of changed things for us was, there's a lot of gear that's still there leftover from the original days," McPherson recalls. "The grand piano that's on all of the songs from the 50s and 60s is there, so we wrote a few songs on that. There's a vibraphone there that you can hear at the beginning of *Crying* by Roy Orbison... we just couldn't keep our hands off that damn vibraphone! In *Lucky Penny* when you hear that kind of bell sound, that's that vibraphone. And there's a marimba there and a celeste and just so much cool gear.

"There's great outboard gear, too, some original compressors, Altec stuff, some really great microphones... the echo chamber is probably the biggest thing. We ran every drum track through it. We learned a lot, actually – we were trying to figure out how to get certain drum sounds that you hear on some of those old recordings. With the help of a couple of engineers in town we were able to get there. But I just can't say enough about it – it was a very powerful experience."

As you might expect, the energy contained in the grooves of *Undivided Heart & Soul* was captured predominantly live in the studio. "We mostly did everything live," remembers McPherson. "I overdubbed vocals later. We tracked vocals live and there were a couple of things we used [on the album] but most of the time I'm concentrating on the guitar playing and my singing sounds pretty bad! There's a lot of mumbling when brainpower is being expended on guitar parts!"

Weapons Of Choice

During the sessions, McPherson turned to several different guitars including a Frankenstein Kent electric tuned to Open C, his trusty Telecaster and an early-60s Supro Dual Tone on which much of the album's material was written – "Blame it on the Link Wray guitar! It ended up basically forcing me into writing a garage rock record!" – but the star was a custom-built TK Smith guitar that combines Smith's Paul Bigbsy-influenced aesthetic with an outline similar to a Gretsch Jupiter Thunderbird.

"I would say the TK Smith guitar was most of the record," he remembers. "Just because it's really versatile. You can get a lot of different things out of it. It's got an out-of-phase switch, so I used that quite a bit. That guitar really just kind of sings. I just kept going back to it."

Although McPherson has well and truly bonded with the TK Smith guitar now, the process of its creation was a long time in the making and he initially had to get over his own hang-ups about beautiful guitars: "TK and I talked about that guitar for a couple of

BETTER LIVING THROUGH COMEDY

Although he didn't contribute in a musical sense on *Undivided Heart & Soul*, Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme had an instrumental role in reigniting McPherson's creative spark. JD explains how Josh helped him get away from it all...

"I met Josh a few years ago at El Paso airport," JD recalls. "I don't know how, but he had my record and anyway we made friends, he's a wonderful guy. And I was actually having a hard time getting this record off the ground, I was missing material, we'd started a session and it got cancelled and we kinda burned through some of our budget and I was really freaking out. We even had times where the band wasn't speaking to each other! Josh just very kindly said, 'Look, man, come out to Burbank and let's just have fun for a couple of days in the studio. Let's not try to write anything, let's just plug in guitars and play and try stupid things...'

"The point he was trying to make to me was that I was putting pressure on myself and I'd forgotten why I started playing music in the first place. So for just a couple of days it was just hanging in the studio, playing guitars. I took a couple of the songs I'd written to him and he put crazy stuff on them and Dean [Fertita] from Queens Of The Stone Age was there, too, and Dean would put crazy stuff on it and it was some of the most fun I've had since I was 15 years old!

"I just remember one morning he showed up and said, 'My back hurts really bad, I'm gonna lay on the couch for a bit and try to straighten it out, but I want you to watch this.' And he pulled out this TV and had me watch this Martin Short comedy special from the 80s. I'm not sure what that was supposed to do to my brain, but it was really funny. I remember sitting there thinking, 'This is one of the most surreal events in my life'. But he's a wonderful guy, such a musical person and he's always pushing for new sounds and new ideas and making them elegant. The new Queens Of The Stone Age record is amazing."

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years before I got it in my hands. I actually had a TK custom before that for a minute – we did a session at Sun Studio and I borrowed this Strat that he'd built that had his pickups and one of his necks. I know this is going to sound crazy but it was too nice for me!

"I am so abusive to guitars," he admits. "I've played Telecasters for years 'cause it's almost like Telecasters want to be beaten up. And the TK guitar was so nice I couldn't cut loose with it. I gave that back to him and said let's try something else down the road. We kept talking about it. What I wanted him to do was going to be so much work for him and so much money for me. But we worked out a way that he could use one of his Smith Special necks and then just do the body.

"It was supposed to be a cross between a Paul Bigsby guitar and the Jupiter Thunderbird that Bo Diddley played in the early 60s. It's not exactly one of those but that's definitely the inspiration. TK makes all of his hardware – he casts all the aluminium, makes all the pickups and winds them all – so pretty much everything on there is something that would be on a TK Smith Special except he cut out the tops of the Bigsby-style pickups so it makes it a little brighter. And he also added the phase switch.

"It's one of those things – when I went to go pick that guitar up it was like even more of a feeling of tension, it was so nice. But now it's got some nice wears on it and it feels like something I can cut loose on. When I was in my 20s I bought a Duo Jet and I took it back because I was afraid to scratch it! My opinion is that if you get your hands on a guitar that sounds great and feels great, you should wear it out. Let it live a life. Even if it's a vintage guitar don't put it in a closet somewhere."

When it comes to taking special guitars out on the road, McPherson's friend and occasional collaborator Dan Auerbach proved influential: "I went to Dan Auerbach's studio one time to do some songwriting stuff, and I was trying to pick out a guitar and I grabbed a guitar off the wall, and it was this beautiful red Trini Lopez – it had like a little costume jewellery turtle glued onto it. I was like, 'Oh my god, this thing is amazing'.

"After we'd tracked I said, 'This is one of the best things I've ever played' and he said, 'That's Mississippi Fred McDowell's guitar.' I almost passed out! I was like, 'Get this thing off me man, I'm gonna break it!' But he tours with it. He takes Mississippi Fred McDowell's guitar out and plays shows with it. I love that."

JD's TK Smith custom guitar is a combination of Gretsch Jupiter Thunderbird and Paul Bigsby influences

> "My opinion is that if you get your hands on a guitar that sounds great and feels great, you should wear it out. Let it live a life"

Sci-Fi Sounds

Back in RCA Studio B, McPherson's twangy, retro electric guitars were recorded with a simple signal chain and a suitably stripped back approach. "I have this really strange amp that we call the Dalek," he reveals. "It's an old PA head from the 40s that my friend stuffed a Fender tweed Pro circuit into. And it sits on top of a 15-inch cabinet. I dunno, it just kind of looks like a Dalek! That was the amp that we used for the most part and it was usually just plugged straight in.

"As well as the Dalek we had a Fender Bassman, an old tiny little Gibson amp, there were a lot of 60s amps. The studio had a couple of heads that our other guitar player used a lot. Like I said we dragged all our gear in every night... after a week we started whittling things down so that we didn't have to keep dragging everything in every night!"

Effects were limited to mostly outboard plate reverbs and suchlike, but when it came to fuzz, McPherson stomped on a Way Huge Havalina: "It's kind of a 60s germanium fuzz. And I think I might have chained that together with a Fulltone Catalyst for a little more bottom end. But for the most part that was it. I didn't use a lot of pedals. It was almost usually just plugged straight in and turned up really loud. We were really bare bones about it. We had basically just a 57 right on the speaker cabinet and then a room mic present at all times. On Lucky Penny you can hear that it's pretty much all room mic."

Like most great-sounding records, when recording *Undivided Heart & Soul* there was no substitute for moving air and hard work: "We worked so hard, I cannot tell you. We were so incredibly industrious about getting good sounds before recording. We wanted to do as little in the mix as possible. It was so easy to do there, in a lot of ways. They have a smaller 10-foot by 15-foot room next to Studio B that I think they used to use for acoustic demos or singer and piano type things. All my amps were separated off in that room 'cause I was turned up so loud."

JD McPherson's new album *Undivided Heart & Soul* is out now on New West Records

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GEAR REVIEWS

As you can see for yourself on p52, this year's Winter NAMM show provided us with a smorgasbord of gear for us to get our teeth into for 2018. You'll have read all about Fender's American Original flagships and Taylor's remarkable V-Class guitars last month, but the *Guitar Magazine* team came back from California with more than just a tan. We get our hands on Gibson's 2018 Les Pauls for review on p8, but that's not all. The American Original Jazzmaster will knock offset fans' socks off, while brand new Terror heads from Orange show there's still life in the lunchbox amp concept yet. We've also got new guitars from B&G and Gretsch, a clever new Lazy J amp, and boutique pedals from Meris and Fuzzrocious, too. If you're looking for inspirational new gear for 2018, there's no better place to start than here.

Gibson 2018 Les Paul Classic & Les Paul Traditional 08
Gibson's class of 2018 gets a once-over

Fender American Original Jazzmaster 82
Fender's flagship vintage-inspired line goes offset

B&G Little Sister Crossroads Midnight Ocean 86
The remarkable semi-hollow gets humbuckers

Gretsch G6118T Players Edition Anniversary 90
Gretsch reimagines the Anniversary for modern players

Orange Rocker 15 Terror & Brent Hinds Terror 94
Mastodon man's signature box and the Rocker goes tiny

Lazy J J10 LC 98
Boutique tweed tones at more acceptable volume levels

Fuzzrocious Cat King & Blast Furnace 102
Two punchy new stompers from the US boutique maker

Meris Polymoon 106
Ambient bliss from the high-end US pedal brand

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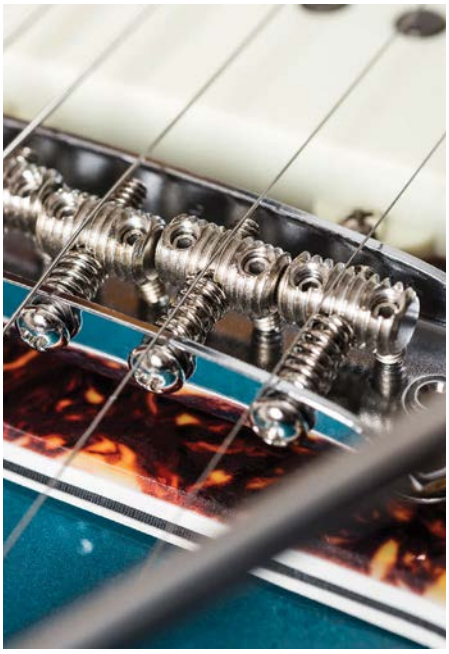

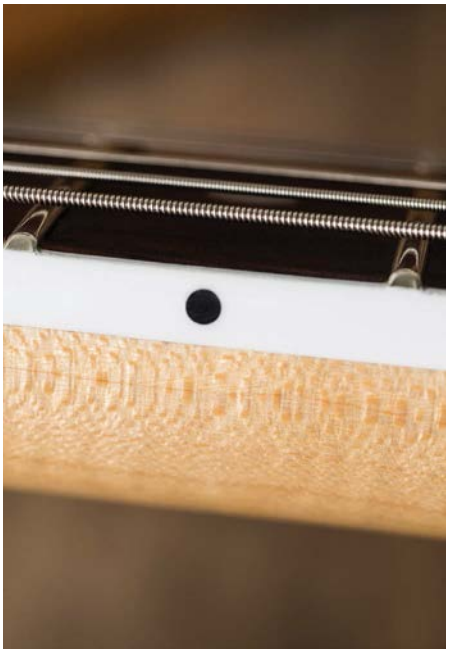

FENDER
AMERICAN ORIGINAL '60S JAZZMASTER

Is Fender finally ready to reward Jazzmaster fans' patience with the perfect US-made guitar they've long been begging for? **RICHARD PURVIS** meets the new king of the offsets

When you've been waiting six decades for something, what's a few more months? Fender launched the American Professional Jazzmaster last year with the promise that the 1958 design's various exasperating quirks had finally been scrubbed out; but while the Am Pro is a fine guitar, the offset faithful will tell you that it isn't a Jazzmaster for purists. With its non-rocking bridge, missing rhythm circuit and Stratocaster-in-disguise pickups, it feels like a 'gateway offset', designed to appeal to the curious rather than the already converted. Now, though, comes the American Original Jazzmaster... and this time Fender's sticking closely to the script.

As we saw with the American Original Tele and Strat reviewed last month, the idea of the new range is to preserve the 'vintage reissue' spirit but with the freedom to add a few modernising tweaks. So, an open goal to configure the ultimate issue-free Jazzmaster? Not quite. Perhaps because Fender has already played the radical revamp card with last year's newcomer, this time it's all about restraint.

And so, for this guitar 'a few modernising tweaks' really means just one: a 9.5-inch fretboard radius. Well, the 7.25-inch curve on the old US reissues was a pain for most players, and one of the few things you couldn't change with a hardware upgrade, so this looks like the most uncontroversially good move since the three little pigs decided to go with wolf-proof mortar.

These Pure Vintage '65 pickups produce a sugary sparkle that offset fans will recognise with a smile

Other than that, the core specs are in line with the American Vintage '65 Jazzmaster that this guitar is replacing. The floating bridge has old-fashioned threaded barrel saddles; the vibrato arm is a simple push-in type; the mellow-voiced rhythm circuit remains, with its own volume and tone controls on the upper part of the scratchplate; truss rod access, so helpfully moved to the headstock on the Am Pro, returns to the body end of the medium-C neck; and a peek under the guard reveals that both pots are one meg, for minimum treble bleed. However many of those choices you agree with (and it's unlikely to be all of them), this is definitely a real Jazzmaster.

Another feature offset fans have had to get used to down the years is a limited colour palette, and that continues here with just three options: sunburst, Olympic White and this metallic Ocean Turquoise. It's a stunning finish, nicely accented by the tortoiseshell 'guard – though as much as we love a bound neck on a Jazzmaster, its icy-white shade doesn't really go with the creamy 'aged' plastics. The pickguard is

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Original '60s Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £1,649 (w/ hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body; bolt-on maple neck with 9.5" radius rosewood fretboard; 21 'vintage tall' frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style tuners, floating bridge with threaded barrel saddles, push-in vibrato arm with up-bend lock button
- **ELECTRICS** Two Pure Vintage '65 single-coil pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone; rhythm circuit switch (neck pickup only), volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.4mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.8mm at first fret, 25.8mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.5mm at nut, 56mm at bridge (adjustable)
- **WEIGHT** 3.7kg/8.1lbs
- **FINISH** Ocean Turquoise (as reviewed), 3-Color Sunburst, Olympic White
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **fender.com**

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LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Fender American Professional Jazzmaster** (**£1,589**) is an accessible alternative that shouldn't scare Strat fans too much, while the **Fender Classic Player Jazzmaster Special** (**£1,049**) throws vintage specs even further out of the window. Your non-Fender options for Jazzmaster-style guitars include the lovely **Novo Serus J** (**from £2,899**)

easily swapped out should you not be a fan, and the binding will age naturally in the long run.

In Use

How do you like your Jazzmasters? Warm and plunky, with a strong percussive thump on the wound strings? Or brisk and breezy, with more bite than body? Our review guitar is a lightweight unplugged strummer, with plenty of freshness but not much going on in the lower mids. Assuming this is a representative sample of the model, it seems the American Original is going to be a zinger, not a plunker.

A clean blackface amp soon bears that out. If part of the reason Jazzmasters are chronically misunderstood is that people find them too shrill, this one isn't about to change anyone's mind at the first pluck. We're not talking about the kind of ear-stabbing harshness you might recall from old Japanese reissues, mind – the top end is certainly crisp, but these Pure Vintage '65 pickups produce a sugary sparkle that offset fans will recognise with a smile, and there's no shortage of fullness at the other end of the spectrum. Still, those who prefer jazzier sounds will soon be looking for ways to take the edge off – whether that means changing the pups, installing 250k pots or just turning down the amp tone a tad.

Once you are happy with the EQ balance, this is an easy guitar to fall in love with: the bridge pickup has much less bark than a Tele's but cuts through in its own distinctive and musical way; the neck pickup can be smooth and moody but maintains a snappy attack even on the lower strings; and the rhythm circuit goes about its mild-mannered work without fuss. But the real heart-stealer is the middle setting, which combines a sweetly scooped midrange with more twinkly chime than two music boxes fighting over a glockenspiel.

Now, if you really want to make a Jazzmaster happy, give it a Klon-type overdrive to play with – this is the perfect way to add light crunch while thickening up the mids and softening down those dangerous transients. It's a formula that works wonders with this guitar, turning it into a superb tool for expressive (but non-bluesy) medium-gain lead work. Sorry, Stratocasters – you can't touch this.

It has to be said that our review instrument behaves impeccably throughout the testing period: the strings stay in their saddle slots, the bridge never gets stuck in mid-rock, and the push-in vibrato arm doesn't work loose either. But these are issues that tend to develop in the long term, so familiar upgrade options from the likes of Staytrem, Mastery and GraphTech remain as appealing as ever.

Fender's desire to play it conservative with the hardware, if only to keep clear distance between this guitar and the ultra-modernised Am Pro model, is understandable; it just means that, for some of us at least, the 60-year wait for out-of-the-box perfection continues.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Hallelujah, a proper US Jazzmaster with a modern fretboard radius!
+ Clean tones have loads of sweet, perky character
+ Gorgeous low/mid-gain sounds with the right overdrive

– Limited colour options
– The hardware is fine for now, but could become temperamental in the long term

Though it's still not quite the modded out-of-the-box Jazzmaster that some are pining for, this is an absolutely cracking vintage-style offset

9/10

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B&G GUITARS
LITTLE SISTER CROSSROADS MIDNIGHT OCEAN

After scooping our 2017 Electric Guitar Of The Year award, the Crossroads is back with a cutaway, humbuckers and a moody new finish. **HUW PRICE** burns the Midnight oil...

When B&G first unveiled the Little Sister, there was something about its mashup of 30s and 50s styling that seemed to go hand in glove with P-90 pickups. For the Crossroads model's humbucker coming-out party then, it's appropriate that B&G has opted to mix up the visuals – after all, there's something undeniably evocative about a guitar with a deep black finish, gold hardware, cutaway and a pair of humbuckers anchoring the whole thing, isn't there? We certainly think it looks the part – just as classy as its sunburst sibling, but with an air of rock-ready menace about proceedings.

That's a good thing, as the ultra-thin UV cured Midnight Ocean finish is only available for a cutaway Crossroads body and it's the only finish option if you want humbuckers, too. There is a solid maple cap and a three-piece mahogany body lurking under there, but you wouldn't know it without peeking through the solitary f-hole or taking off the gold plated control cavity cover.

Contrasted against the jet black, B&G's faux binding has never looked better. When we reviewed the prototype last year, we were told the production models would have ovangkol rather than rosewood fingerboards due to CITES export restrictions, and that the fingerboard and side dots would be white plastic rather than pearl.

This has proved to be the case with the former, but we have no complaints about the look or feel. The edges are heavily rolled in a successful attempt to ape the feel of played-in vintage instruments. It turns out the marker dots remain pearloid plastic, and look just fine.

> The humbuckers are a triumph of clarity, touch dynamics and flat-out vintage tone

If you missed our review of the Crossroads back in July 2017, the differences between this guitar and the B&Gs crafted in Israel include the Asian-made pickups, electronics and hardware, modern glues and the non-nitro finish. The fat, vintage style one-piece mahogany neck and Golden Age Restoration tuners are the same, and customers wishing to upgrade can buy B&G's Private Build brass bridge, wiring harness and pickups to get it even closer to the high-end models.

In Use

Getting to grips with one of B&G's guitars is always a pleasure, but clearly the big excitement for us here is that it's the first time we've reviewed a B&G guitar equipped with humbuckers and a cutaway. However, before we get onto that, we want to dwell on the unplugged tone because it's pretty remarkable.

We were recently discussing our preferred acoustic guitars at *TGM*, and one wag offered unplugged swamp ash Teles and lightweight Les Pauls as his favourites. Although said in jest, he wasn't entirely joking and it was a point worth making. The very

KEY FEATURES

B&G Little Sister Crossroads Midnight Ocean

- **PRICE** £1,550 (inc gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Chambered African mahogany body with maple cap, one-piece African mahogany set neck with rounded V profile, 12" radius ovangkol fingerboard with dot inlays and 20 frets
- **HARDWARE** Solid brass tailpiece, ABR bridge, Golden Age Restoration tuners
- **ELECTRICS** PAF-style humbucking pickups, master volume & tone, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.92mm at nut, 54.19mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.23mm at nut, 51.39mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.68kg/5.9lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Midnight Ocean only
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 **www.bnguitars.com**

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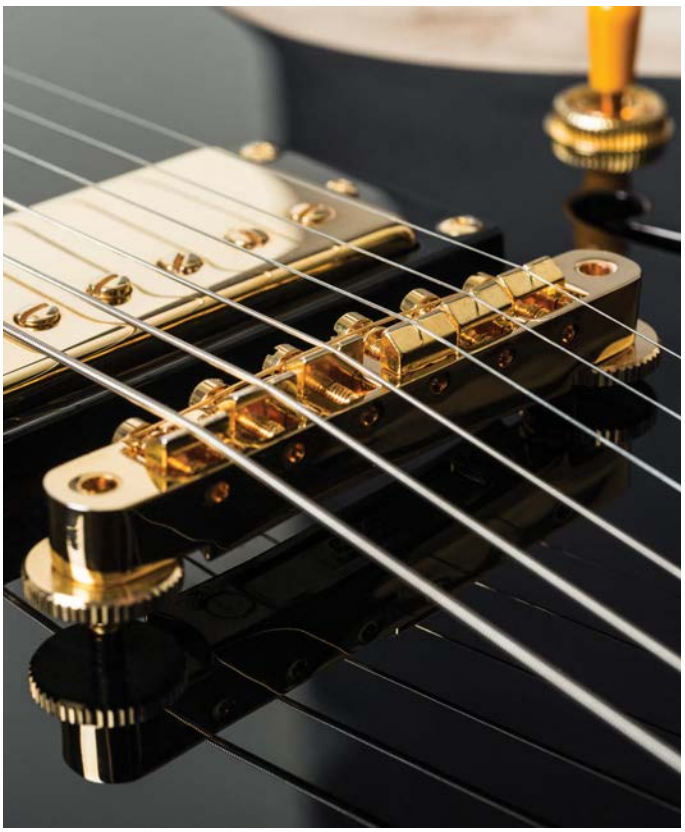
LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The B&G is a very individual instrument, but single-cutaway competition for the Little Sister Crossroads includes the **Gibson ES-Les Paul Special II** (**£1,227**), the **Duesenberg Starplayer TV** (**£1,867**) and the heavily chambered LP-alike **Maybach Lester Cherry Lane 58** (**£1,697**)

best solidbodies do tend to sound complex, dynamic and inspiring even without electronic assistance. And although you won't get flat-top volume, they're a lot easier and more comfortable to play.

On that basis, you might assume that semis would sound even better than solidbodies unplugged, but this isn't necessarily the case when trebles are subdued and sustain is compromised. We find this guitar remarkable because it's as loud as a semi, as bright as any Tele and sustains like a Les Paul.

However, having played a few B&G guitars, we can report that the Little Sister also has a sound that is distinctly its own, and we think the bridge and tailpiece have a lot to do with that. In essence, there is audible sympathetic resonance going on behind the bridge and this provides the spooky and echoey overtones along with a sense of natural reverb that we tend to associate with ladder-braced acoustics and steel-bodied resonators.

It's a fine line to tread because if there's too much behind the bridge action, the overtones can become intrusive and the wasted string energy causes a loss of sustain, but B&G has it spot on with this guitar – and then some.

Despite the cutaway, the feel remains essentially unchanged because the neck still joins at the 14th fret – rather than the 16th fret join of most Les Paul-style guitars. This makes playing the Crossroads a compact and stretch free experience and, so far as we can establish, there's no sonic compromise to be made for adding unfettered upper-fret access.

At last we plug in and it keeps getting better. Although they ohm out at 8.03K and 8.18K, these humbuckers are a triumph of clarity, touch dynamics and flat out vintage tone. Last time we found it hard to decide whether we preferred the B&G P-90s or the Crossroads' Asian-made units and we suspect it might be the same story with these humbuckers.

There's no boutique brand attached and specs are not quoted, but it hardly matters. These pickups are among the best vintage PAF-style humbuckers we have tried and they suit the guitar perfectly. They sweeten the acoustic tone's metallic brightness and shift the emphasis to the vocal midrange qualities. Microphony is noticeable, which we tend to prefer, but the clean up capabilities are slightly compromised by the presence of non-1950s-style wiring. Fortunately, it's an easy fix.

Touch dynamics are outstanding and the bridge supplies just the right amount of snap, snarl and bite without edging over into crass aggression. Over at the neck, things mellow to a more rounded, woody and fluid tone and, as with all really good PAF-style sets, you get a third and very distinct tone with both pickups together.

In lieu of individual volume controls, some height adjustment may be necessary to dial in the midrange quack, but it's there if you're inclined to look for it. Whether you play it dirty or keep it clean, play with a pick or fingers on strings, there is one characteristic that we really must single out.

Like a genuine 1950s Burst, this humbucker-equipped Crossroads has an almost unnatural ability to hang onto notes beyond any reasonable expectations – and then veer off into all kinds of harmonic bloom while it's doing it. All you have to do is hang on for the ride – and what a wonderfully wild ride it is.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Outstanding pickups
+ Equally enjoyable plugged and unplugged
+ Extraordinary sustain
+ Fantastic vintage neck profile

– Only the non-50s-style wiring

With the easy playability afforded by the cutaway and these remarkably good humbuckers, this is another hugely impressive B&G guitar

9/10

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Fender Custom Shop Jaco Pastorius Tribute - Fretless
Although technically secondhand, this bass is in like new condition. Finished in a fantastic road-worn Relic finish, based on Jaco Pastorius's bass guitar. It features a Select Alder Body, Nitro-cellulose Lacquer, Custom 60s Single Coil Pickups. It also comes with the original Fender Deluxe Hard Case. More photos and information online.

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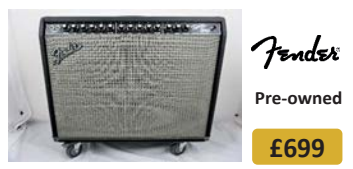
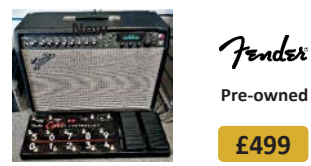
Gretsch G6120-59LTV QM LTD
The '59 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins. Featuring trestle bracing, dual TV Jones® Classic hum-bucking pickups. With Hard Case.

Fender Blues Junior Limited Edition
Finished in Lacquered Tweed. 15 watts all valve. 12" Jensen Speaker. Recently re-valved. Fantastic Condition. Photos Online.



Fender '94 Twin Amp (Evil Twin)
4x 6L6 (100 watts / 25 watts switchable). Known as 'Evil Twin'. Excellent condition. Comes with Fender 3 way switch and cover.



Fender Cyber Twin
Circa 2002. 2x12" combo. Auto Rotary Con-trols (self moving). 2x 65 watt amp. Comes with Cyber Foot Pedal board controller.

PRS SE Fredrik Akesson
Signature Model. 22 Fret wide fat neck. 24.5" scale length. Bird inlays. TonePros stoptail bridge. With Padded Bag.

Fender Am Pro Telecaster Deluxe
Finished in Sonic Grey. Rosewood Finger-board. Shawbucker Humbucking pickups. Deep C neck. Comes with Hard Case.

Fender FSR Classic 50s Telecaster 90
Limited Edition. Fender Special Run. Finished in Lake Placid Blue. P-90 neck pickup & Amer-ican Vintage '58 Bridge Pickup.

Gretsch G5435TG Limited Edition
Finished in Candy Apple Red with Gold Hard-ware. Dual Black Top Filter'Tron Humbucking Pickups. Beautiful!!!

Gretsch G5420T Electromatic
Finished in Fairlane Blue. Bigsby Tremolo. Blacktop Filter'tron Humbucking Pickups. 5-ply Maple Body.

Gibson 2001 ES-175 - Vintage Sunburst
Fantastic condition. More photos online. Beautiful tone and action. Comes fully setup with original hard case.

Fender Classic Player Jaguar Special HH
Finished in Olympic White. New Hotter Pickups with fatter tone. Multiple improve-ments. With Fender Gig Bag.

The Heritage H150CM
Made in Gibson's old Kalamazoo Factory in 2001. Featuring Seymour Duncan '59 Hum-buckers. Perfect Condition. Hard Case.

Sandberg California VS
4 String Bass. Finished in Sunburst. 6 Bolted Hard rock maple Neck. Split coil output pick-ups. Fantastic quality.

Fender FSR Classic 69 Telecaster
Pink Paisley. Made in Japan. Fender Special Run. Slim C Neck. Vintage Style Single Coil Pickups. Classic Finish!

Rickenbacker 360/12 Mapleglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

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GRETSCH G6118T PLAYERS EDITION ANNIVERSARY

Launched at last year's Summer NAMM Show in Nashville, this Anniversary model combines Players Edition features with a stellar paint job. **HUW PRICE** finds much to celebrate...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Since its introduction in 1958, the Anniversary has been a mainstay of the Gretsch catalogue. When new, Gretsch took the bewildering decision to spec it out much like the pricier 6120, complete with identical body dimensions, trestle bracing and Filter'Tron pickups. Customers who were prepared to make do without a Bigsby, and binding on the f-holes and fingerboard could nab a high-spec Gretsch at an affordable price.

By 1960 Gretsch 'downgraded' the Anniversary by removing the trestles and fitting single-coil HiLo pickups. They're also fine guitars, but the trestle braced examples are generally regarded as the most desirable.

For the G6118T, Gretsch has chosen to straddle old and new – in essence creating a golden era Anniversary reimagined for modern players. There's trestle bracing, Filter'Tron pickups and a pinned 6120-spec rocking bar bridge that is vastly superior, both sonically and structurally, to the vintage Space Control unit.

Those who struggle with Bigsby stringing will welcome the contemporary string-through design. Rather than hooking the string balls onto pins set into the rocking bar, and hoping they don't fall off before you get the string up to tension, simply thread each string through its hole, wrap over and tune up.

> The G6118T is in essence a golden era Anniversary, reimagined for modern players

Brian Setzer has long been Gretsch's most high-profile player, and his preference for locking tuners is well known. So, it's no big surprise to spot a chrome set of locking Gotohs on here. We also appreciate the added strength provided by the metal jack plate.

Our attention then shifts to the electronics and despite appearances, the controls are actually streamlined. Gone is the mud switch – there was never any space on the Anniversaries for a standby switch. Instead the cluster of knobs beneath the Bigsby comprises individual volume controls and a master tone.

A master volume is located at the cutaway and the single switch is a three-way pickup selector. Gretsch is

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gretsch alternatives include the **G6118T Players Edition Anniversary** (**£2,168**) with the same specs as our review model and a Lotus Ivory/Charcoal Metallic finish, or you can get it in Smoke Green for the same price. Outside of the Gretsch catalogue, the TV Jones-loaded **Collings Statesman LC** (**£5,400**) is one to check out.

worldmags.net

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G6118T Players Edition Anniversary

- **PRICE** £2,259 (inc case)
- **DESCRIPTION** 6-string hollowbody electric guitar. Made in Japan
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body with trestle bracing, set maple neck with medium U profile, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid thumbnail markers and 22 jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** V-cut Bigsby, pinned rocking bar bridge with rosewood base, Gotoh locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups, master volume, master tone, individual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.13mm at nut, 52.7mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 23.25mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.55mm at nut, 52.9mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.25kg/7.16lbs
- **LEFT HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Iridium Silver/Azure Metallic
- **CONTACT** Gretsch Guitars EMEA 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

obviously chuffed about the use of a paper/oil tone cap, too, because it's placed right under the F-hole where you just can't miss it.

You can't see the treble bleed capacitor across the master volume control, but we're glad to learn the G6118T has one. There's also a no-load tone pot, which is a smart move because you can get the no-treble-leakage effect a mud switch provides in the centre position, plus fine control of treble response. In other words, it's the best of both worlds.

Another less obvious feature is the slim 2.25-inch body depth. Gretsch archtops gradually thinned from the mid-50s onwards, and 2.25 inches became the norm in 1961. It's a great compromise because the body has sufficient internal volume to produce full acoustic tone and you get the vibe of a big single-cut without it feeling like too much of an armful.

In Use

Picking it up to play, the G6118T feels a little weightier and more solid than a vintage Gretsch, but the acoustic tone is no less vibrant. It's also fairly loud, very deep and full, and has a refined smoothness that makes it a pleasure to play unplugged. Even more impressive is the long sustain, and the treble's robustness coupled with a hint of woody midrange honk provides an unmistakably Gretsch voicing.

> The pickups excel, with superb definition and a treble chime so intense it's like a built-in chorus

We hear a bit more brightness and volume from our own 6120 conversion (which began life as a 1960 Anniversary) but the review guitar has a lower resonance and more of a natural compression effect. For a guitar that may get a load of fingerpicking, that's no bad thing.

We have previously said that we don't believe Gretsch High Sensitive Filter'Trons get the credit they deserve, and nothing about these pickups causes us to reconsider. They do sound slightly different to our vintage set, but they have much to recommend them.

For starters Gretsch has made them slightly louder, without sacrificing clarity or dynamics. Since the DC resistance readings are a vintage ballpark 3.88k and 4.57k, and we find them a bit brighter, we think the magnets must be a little stronger. The trade-off is that you don't quite get the same warm midrange growl and there's a little less fine detail, but the modern versions get surprisingly close.

Starting clean with our Rift PR18 in Blackface mode, all three pickup settings really excel with superb definition and a treble chime that's so intense it's almost like built-in chorus. For crystalline clean twang and that Telecaster-meets-jazzbox

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Gretsch tone, the bridge pickup delivers the goods.

Flip to the front and the neck pickup rounds things out beautifully while retaining definition. Although these guitars are not generally associated with blues, you get more than enough sweetness and sustain to do the job. In the middle position, there's that wonderful Gretschy phasiness that works so well for fingerstyle.

Backing off the neck volume a tad accentuates the effect, and it sounds so good it makes us regret our decision to do without individual volumes on our 6120 project from last year's Workshop. Overall the G6118T has a more forward and airy voice but it you back off the tone a little, the guitar takes on a woody quack that quickly closes the gap.

Fortunately, this brightness and crispness produces outstanding results with overdrive and fuzz, because the G6118T never gets woolly or indistinct. With added grit, it delivers snarly riffs, big powerchords and cutting solos. It's is also surprisingly playable at high volume and although you do get feedback, it's quite easy to control.

Actually, the whole guitar is easy to control and play. The medium/slim U profile is a dead ringer for the neck on this reviewer's 1963 Tennessean and the fretwork is flawless. We find the Bigsby super smooth and, more importantly, tuning stability is nothing short of remarkable. The G6118T is a thoroughly modern Gretsch that somehow retains all the things we like about old ones. And did we mention it looks amazing?

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Classic Gretsch tone with a modern twist
+ Rock solid tuning stability
+ Thin responsive top and very impressive sustain

- The thumbnail markers look a little cheap on an otherwise premium instrument

A vintage-inspired Gretsch with old-school charm, but none of the quirks – an ideal Anniversary for the modern player

9/10

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ORANGE
ROCKER 15 TERROR & BRENT HINDS TERROR

12 years on, Orange's game-changing Tiny Terror continues to bear juicy fruit with this promising pair of compact heads. **RICHARD PURVIS** finds out if Tiny is still beautiful

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If an Orange control panel would clash with your wallpaper, there are plenty of other shrunken heads in the 15-to-20-watt range to choose from. The **Peavey Classic 20 MH** (**£419**), **Laney Cub Head** (**£295**) and **Engl MetalMaster E309** (**£719**) are all also powered by EL84s

Unless this magazine has a crop of new readers in the tween age bracket, it's safe to say that we can all remember the original Orange Tiny Terror. The TT was the head that kicked off the whole 'lunchbox amp' craze back in 2006, and went on to spawn a host of variant models and imitators before being discontinued in 2016. And now, from beyond the rocking grave, it's spawned a couple more...

Rocker 15 Terror

The basic principle of this Terror remains true to the blueprint: 15 watts from a pair of EL84s, switchable down to seven watts, in a compact white metal chassis. But it's a couple of inches wider than its daddy, and the main reason for that is that it's a two-channel amp. Plus, while the Tiny Terror stripped things right back with just master volume, preamp gain and a single tone control, this model offers a three-band EQ section on the dirty channel for precise tailoring of your overdriven tones.

In fact, hardcore amp geeks will have spotted that the control layout has been lifted directly from another discontinued Orange: the EL34-powered Rocker 30. This is no coincidence. Designer Ade Emsley's real intention here, it turns out, was not so much to expand the legacy of

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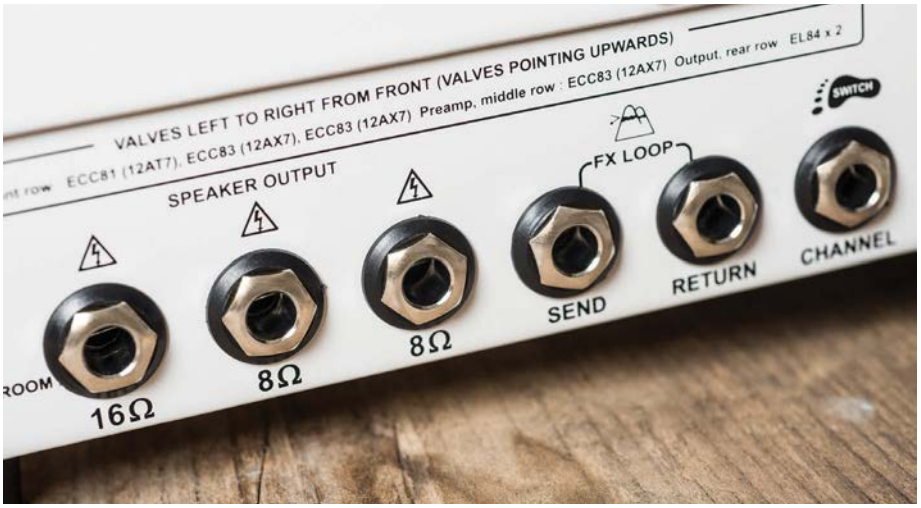

the Tiny Terror as to create a half-powered version of the Rocker 30 in the lunchbox format.

There are a couple of new features round the back in addition to the expected footswitch input for changing channels: a valve-buffered effects loop, and a slider switch marked 'headroom/bedroom' that lets you attenuate the output level to just one watt, or half a watt if you're already in half-power mode.

Brent Hinds Terror

If you don't listen to prog metal played by men with ferocious beards, Brent Hinds is a member of Atlanta four-piece Mastodon. They're mighty loud but also melodic and dynamic, so we're not expecting a crude filth-generator here. The graphical theme, borrowed from Hinds' distinctive head tattoo, is stylish but discreet, and extends to the markers around the knobs.

On the face of it, everything else is a perfect match for the Rocker 15 Terror: same dimensions, same control layout, same half-power and attenuation switches, same valve-buffered loop. We should also mention the build quality, which is entirely consistent across both heads: the metal enclosures feel super-solid, and the guts – despite the PCB-mounted valves, pretty much inevitable at this price point – are neat enough. Mind, it is a bit inconvenient that you have to undo 10 screws to change a valve and only four to get to the circuit board.

There's enough gain for full-on hard rock riffing, and big chords ring out with nice natural compression

In Use

Did you notice the lack of a 'clean' channel on either of these amps? Orange has opted for the term 'natural' instead, and when we spark up the Rocker 15 Terror through an oversized 1x12 cab it doesn't take long to find out why – this is about as clean as a student's bedroom on the last day of term. Well, alright, there is a small window of undistorted tone with the volume set just high enough to be properly on, but by 10 o'clock things are already crunching up with humbuckers.

It's not a bad clean tone, by the way, and it's a shame there are no EQ controls on this channel to make more of it. But the name 'Rocker'

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is a fairly obvious indicator of what this amp is really about – and when the overdrive does come it's classic Orange stuff. At full blast (still on the natural channel) there's enough gain for full-on hard rock riffing, and big chords ring out with nice natural compression. Switching to half power doesn't actually make things all that much quieter, but softens down the midrange clonk and turns the overdrive a tad more fizzy.

The dirty channel starts off rather tame after all that, but there's plenty more to come. The vintage British drive gets richer and richer as you crank the preamp gain, and sounds even better if you're free to turn the volume up to full for a bit of output valve distortion. Whipping the mids down to zero and boosting the bass and treble, meanwhile, gives a more modern metal voicing that doesn't sound forced but sits up and begs to be noodled at. The half-power switch makes a more dramatic difference to the perceived output level on this channel, and the 'bedroom' option takes things down even further without completely ripping the heart out of the tone – which could be great news for your neighbours.

The natural channel on the Hinds model really could have been called 'clean' – even with peppy P-90s it only starts roughing up around half volume. Maxed out it gets just as fiery as the Rocker, but there's more scope for lightly overdriven picking around the middle reaches of the dial here. EQ-wise it's about the same: clear and sweet but not exactly sparkly.

With all controls at noon on the dirty channel, however, this suddenly sounds like a very different amplifier. There's no shortage of gain, and it's likably smooth, but the voicing is very much mids-focused so it can sound bass-light. This is not quite what we were expecting... but there's a twist. As soon as you start to wind up the preamp gain towards its upper limits, the bottom end fills out dramatically, balancing out those biting upper mids for a sound that's as warm as it is fearsome. It records well too and sounds seriously meaty when double-tracked.

KEY FEATURES

Orange Rocker 15 Terror

- **PRICE** £549
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel valve head. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 15W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x EL84
- **CONTROL PANEL** Power, 15W/7W/ standby, dirty/natural switches; dirty volume, bass, middle, treble, gain; natural volume; guitar input
- **REAR PANEL** 2x 8-ohm and 1x 16-ohm speaker outputs, FX loop send and return, footswitch input; headroom/ bedroom switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 356 x 177 x 150mm
- **WEIGHT** 6.4kg/14.1lbs
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 020 8905 2828 **orangeamps.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Lashings of smooth British overdrive on tap
+ Half-power and attenuation features work well
+ Channel-switching is a welcome addition

– Very little clean headroom

Classic rock in a small box, with some added versatility for gigging and low-level practice

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Orange Brent Hinds Terror

- **PRICE** £569
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel valve head. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 15W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x EL84
- **CONTROL PANEL** Power, 15W/7W/ standby and dirty/natural channel switches; dirty channel volume, bass, middle, treble, gain; natural channel volume; guitar input
- **REAR PANEL** 2x 8-ohm and 1x 16-ohm speaker outputs, FX loop send and return, footswitch input; headroom/ bedroom switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 356 x 177 x 150mm
- **WEIGHT** 6.4kg/14.1lbs

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ More flexible than the Rocker 15 Terror but with the same useful low-power settings
+ Properly thunderous tones when you crank the gain

– Mid-focused crunch settings lack low-end punch with some guitars

More snarly than the Rocker 15 Terror but no less classy, this is a genuine clean/dirty channel-switcher

8/10

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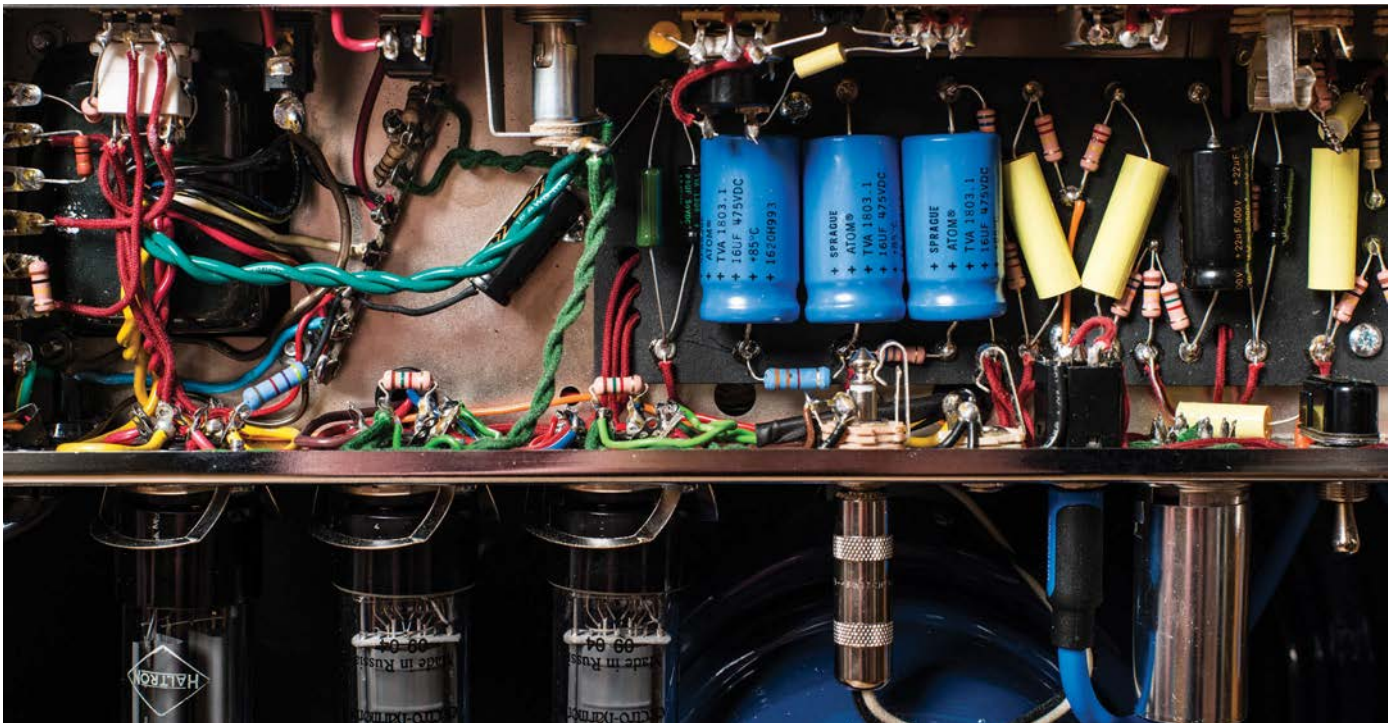

LAZY J
J10LC

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Many discerning pro and amateur players consider Jesse Hoff's amplifiers to be among the finest on the planet. **HUW PRICE** meets a new model that might be the best Lazy J yet...

A while ago, a Lazy J customer enquired about ordering a custom-built, low-power amp based on a tweed Princeton. However, UK-based American amp guru and Lazy J mainman Jesse Hoff has never been a fan of single-ended circuits, so instead he developed a push-pull amplifier combining the preamp of his much-loved J20 with a 10-watt output stage. The result is this new addition to the Lazy J range, the J10LC.

Two cabinet sizes are available – there's the 5E3 sized version we're reviewing, and a smaller enclosure – but both can accommodate a 12-inch Celestion Blue alnico speaker. VAC power scaling comes as standard, while Lazy J's optional extras include footswitchable spring reverb and tremolo modules (see spec for pricing). This review amp comes fully loaded with all the goodies.

Unlike the J20, 6V6 power valves are the only option here, but you can push the input harder with a 12AX7 preamp tube rather than the stock 12AY7, and a bit more clean headroom and low-end tightness accompanies a 5Y3 to GZ34 rectifier swap.

In Use

As luck would have it, when the J10 arrives we're still in possession of the Swart Antares reviewed last month, presenting an opportunity to compare two amps from well-regard boutique brands. The J10's cabinet is smaller, but it doesn't sound bass-light or boxy next to the oversized Swart. With the tone and volume controls set in near identical positions, differences between the two amps are clear.

Add some reverb and it's so pretty and dynamic, we get lost in Steve Cropper and Hendrix for quite some time

The Swart's tone is smoother, more refined and nuanced, but it's also a little darker. The J10 is more inclined towards a throaty midrange roar, but it's also brighter and a bit clearer. We suspect the Celestion Blue has something to do with that.

It all depends what floats your boat, but if these fine amps were beers, the Swart would be a craft lager while the J10 is more of a hoppy IPA. The Lazy J imparts more flavour and colouration to the tone, and if overdrive and attitude are more your thing, it has the edge.

The Antares has the best onboard amp reverb we've tried, but the Lazy J's reverb module is impressive by any standards, and more than holds its own. It's warm, deep and versatile, and with tone and level controls mounted on the module, it can be smooth or splashy. It knocks spots off regular amp spring reverbs.

Bringing in the J10's bias tremolo produces a thick, chesty throb and the speed range is more than sufficient for most players' needs. There are depth and speed controls on the module's enclosure but you may need to adjust the depth when you play with the attenuation activated because the effect's

KEY FEATURES

Lazy J J10LC

- **PRICE** £2,516 (as reviewed, including tremolo, reverb, Variable Attenuation Control and VAT)
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel cathode biased valve combo with footswitchable reverb, tremolo and power scaling. Made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 10W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AY7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input sockets, volume, volume, tone/mid boost, power, VAC
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker outs, bass roll-off switch
- **SPEAKER** 1x12" Celestion Blue
- **DIMENSIONS** 510 x 410 x 210mm
- **WEIGHT** 35lbs/15.9kg
- **OPTIONS** The more compact J10 starts at £1,499 (+VAT). The J10LC starts at £1,599 (+VAT). Both configurations include Variable Attenuation Control as standard. Reverb and tremolo modules are £299 (+VAT) and £199 (+VAT) respectively
- **CONTACT** Lazy J 0843 289 4089 **www.lazyjprojects.com**

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Optional tremolo and reverb modules are mounted around the back but footswitchable on the fly

The tweed Deluxe-style panel's redundant ground switch hole is repurposed to accomodate the power scaling control, while pulling the tone control engages a mid-boost

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Other boutique Brit-made amplifiers with Fender ancestry include the 15-watt **Gartone Jewel** (**£1,995**) – which features spring reverb, bias tremolo and a Celestion Blue – and the **Rift Tweed 15** (**from £1,249**), which comes in a choice of three different Deluxe circuits and cabinet styles

intensity increases dramatically as more power scaling is applied.

Most narrow-panel tweed-derived circuits, the J10 included, are nominally two-channel amps. However, the 'normal' channel generally sounds nothing of the sort. Consequently, it tends to get overlooked by most players, but we decide to try it regardless – and find some rather cool tones therein.

It must be said, the normal channel is unsuited to general playing duties because it's very dark. Before you cry 'jazz channel', it needs pointing out that the treble roll-off is so pronounced that the archtops we try sound too muffled and indistinct – even with the tone maxed out. As the volume increases, so does the upper harmonic content, but the overdrive that comes with it isn't jazz friendly. That said, with bridge P-90s and Filter'Trons, you get a fine and fat midrange honk that's fun for revved up jump blues and the background texture tones Billy Gibbons used before he stopped shaving. You may not use it much, but it's good to know it's there.

The brilliant channel is very different, and far more versatile. Although low-volume overdrive may have revived interest in 50s tweeds back in the 1970s, their clean tones are just as good. The J10 stays fairly clean with Strat single coils up to around four, and the tone sparkles, chimes and breathes. Add some reverb and it's so pretty and dynamic, we get lost in Steve Cropper and Hendrix for quite some time.

Despite the impressive clean headroom, the J10 certainly isn't short on gain, even with a 12AY7 for V1. It comes on gradually, and as you get to grips with the way that the volume and tone interact, you'll find loads of tonal shades. Best of all, the J10 does that classic 5E3 trick where you set the tone and brilliant volume almost all the way up, and turn the normal volume to the point just before the output level begins to drop. This causes the J10 to produce a ferociously splatty Neil Young pseudo-fuzz, and your guitar volume will begin to act more like a gain control. As you roll it back, the J10 gets progressively cleaner with relatively little drop in level.

Although rated at 10 watts, the J10 is a loud little critter and for home playing, the power scaling feature makes sense. We have mixed feelings about power scaling because it doesn't always produce the best results, but Lazy J's Variable Attenuation Control is hard to fault. The tonal character remains remarkably consistent, with the attenuated sound retaining brightness and clarity. It's also devoid of harshness and grit, so on balance we prefer it to a power soak. You may experience a lightness in bass response at low volumes – with and without power scaling activated – but that's where the bass switch comes in handy.

Like the mid-boost switch, its effect is noticeable without being over the top. Rather than dramatically altering the J10's voicing, the effect is more like switching from modern to old-style octal preamp valves. Depending on the volume setting, a moderate increase in overdrive accompanies a thickening of the mids. The drive also smooths out and touch response feels slightly more compressed.

In a boutique amp market that's saturated with tweed clones, Jesse Hoff stands out because he has always sought to add his own twist to the classic recipe. Even without all the optional features, the J10 would be an exciting amp, but with the extras onboard, it's ideal for practising at home, low volume jamming and easy recording. It's the most enjoyable Lazy J amplifier we've played since the J20, and although it has softer bass and not as much punch, we might actually prefer it to Hoff's flagship. Impressive stuff.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Pretty cleans and ferocious overdrive tones
+ Fabulous touch dynamics
+ Very effective power scaling
+ Impressive effects modules

– Quality of this level is always going to come with a price to match

A great way to get vintage 5E3-style tones and dynamics at sensible volume levels, while the optional effects are a real bonus

9/10

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FUZZROCIOUS CAT KING & BLAST FURNACE

New Jersey boutique builder Fuzzrocious offers no-compromise effects pedals for the sonic pugilist. **MICHAEL WATTS** straps himself in for a wild ride...

Ryan Ratajski's Fuzzrocious brand is fast becoming an established name for guitarists looking for high quality, hand-wired boutique effects offering new music-led ideas and made to a standard rather than a budget. A lot of love and thought has gone into the creation of these pedals, and that's evident from the discriminating choice of components and the fact that for practical and ecological reasons related to the use and disposal of batteries, they only run from a nine-volt DC 2.1mm centre-negative adaptor.

Today we're going to be looking at two pedals from the company that offer refreshingly original takes on the more aggressive end of the sonic spectrum. The Blast Furnace is a bellicose sputtering fuzz with a raucous twist, but first, we have The Cat King, whose double-wide casing bristles with no less than eight knobs, three footswitches and a mini toggle switch – let's dive in...

Cat King

This pedal's original name, The Rat King, gives us some insight into the intent of its creators – Pro Co's original RAT unit has been a popular jumping off point for pedal makers since its arrival in the 1970s, and it's provided the basis for Fuzzrocious's feline fire-breather. Inside the Cat King's mammoth casing you'll find a combination of some of the more popular RAT mods, but with a little something extra that's designed to elevate the design to new heights, and set it apart from the crowd – something that's become a real hallmark of the company's units.

At its most basic, it's a low-to-high gain distortion unit with two distinct distortion modes. Now, this is not a dual-channel set-up, nor a cascading gain stage – you can set two differing distortion levels on the Cat King, giving all manner of crunch/distortion options with real ease and simplicity. There's also a little sting in the tail courtesy of the feedback knob and dedicated footswitch – but we'll come to this little wrinkle later...

Blast Furnace

The fuzz world is a crowded place these days, with companies providing every flavour imaginable from the soaring Muff cello through to the stuttering, gated 'turd covered in burning hair' obnoxiousness.

At first glance, the Blast Furnace might appear to be limited in what it can offer with its simple control layout. But things get weird when a closer look at those knobs reveals, not the expected volume and tone controls, but volume and repeats. Hang on... repeats?!

> The Blast Furnace is heavy. It's aggressive, disconcerting, exhilarating and rather glorious

Oh yes – the BF is listed by Fuzzrocious as a 'fuzz with momentary delay' – we did tell you that Fuzzrocious likes to sprinkle a frisson of the unusual into its pedal brew, didn't we?

In Use

With such an intriguing design, it'd be rude not to start with the Blast

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

FUZZROCIOUS CAT KING

If you're looking for dual-dirt at the more polite end of the spectrum, the **Electro-Harmonix Hot Wax** (**£107**) combines the company's Hot Tubes and Crayon overdrives in one unit. If you'd prefer having two identical but tweakable distortions in one box, the **T-Rex Mudhoney II** (**£135**) is a well-honed choice, while if you want distortion, fuzz and overdrive in one package, the **Empress Multidrive** (**£275**) is a blendable behemoth

FUZZROCIOUS BLAST FURNACE

The fuzz world isn't short of insane pedals that will push sonic boundaries. The new **ZVex Vexter Fuzz Factory Vertical** (**£175**) crams almost every flavour of fuzz you could imagine into a handy compact-pedal-sized chassis. **JHS Pedals** knows a thing about gnarly fuzz, and the now discontinued **Bun Runner** offers two distinct chainable fuzz tones if you can track one down. Equally hard to track down but possibly the maddest of the lot, the **Devi Ever Truly Beautiful Disaster** blends oscillator, fuzz, feedback loop and an optical sensor for abrasive, experimental madness

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Furnace, and while we go in with the full knowledge that the good people at Fuzzrocious intended to gift the world "an original gated fuzz" in this stompbox, the sheer ferocity on hand catches your reviewer spectacularly unprepared.

This thing is heavy. It's aggressive, disconcerting, exhilarating and ultimately rather glorious. Though not intended as a retro sound, there are elements of the pedals that gave psychedelic and desert stoner-rock their power with touches of Ram's Head and Good Companion in the mix, plus Fuzzrite and even momentary shades of the truly upsetting home-brewed Regulus VIII of the Os Mutantes golden era.

It turns out that the volume control is only there if you feel like engaging the pedal's internal tone circuit with the mini-switch has caused your volume to drop. Otherwise this pedal is either on full or off. The difference in perceived SPL is actually quite dramatic when bypassing the tone section, granting the sort of wide-open sound often associated with wiring your guitar straight to the output jack.

And now about the delay. Given Fuzzrocious's MO so far it would be misguided to expect a shimmering, multi-tap number. Instead we have something far more fun. This delay starts as a fairly heavy handed slapback and by the time you've turned the knob fully clockwise, it becomes a self-oscillating burbling screamer of joy. Fuzzrocious has put a momentary switch here meaning that an adrenaline-pumping sonic barrage is accessible literally on tap.

Despite its aggressive nature, the Blast Furnace does feel very responsive and grippy, with nuances of screaming bends and vibrato coming through clearly before the gate snatches your note into sputtering nothingness.

Having suitably recovered, we turn our attention to the Cat King. With its big enclosure and myriad knobs, it's a little intimidating off the bat, so let's run through them. The volume knob of course is self-explanatory. Next to it is a filter knob which rolls off the highs as you go clockwise. Once you pass the two distortion controls you are confronted with a brace of knobs labelled clip 1 and clip 2. These allow the player to sculpt the way their bass and treble signals distort, a potentially very musical feature.

As the name suggests, the diode knob allows the player to blend between either an 1N914 diode like the original RAT or the LEDs that were used in the Turbo version. There is also a diode mini-switch that bypasses this part of the pedal for an untrammelled, open sound.

Finally there is a feedback knob with its own momentary footswitch. You'd be forgiven for assuming this is part of a delay. In fact this produces instant squalls of screeching chaos that disappear as soon as you take your foot off the button.

It's the sort of life-affirming hooliganism that noise artists will appreciate very much indeed. You can manipulate the character and pitch of this sonic assault with your guitar's volume knob, which reassuringly does not clean it up nicely in the slightest as you roll it back towards zero.

Any unit offering so much will stand or fall on ease of use. The Cat King is a well thought out and intuitive pedal with a sonic palette that covers everything from punkish overdrive to brutal, crushing (but never fizzy) distortion and, with the judicious application of the feedback switch, utter madness awaits.

KEY FEATURES

Fuzzrocious Cat King

- **PRICE** £269
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-mode distortion pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, filter, clip 1, clip 2, feedback, diode, dist 2, feedback footswitch, dist 2 footswitch, bypass footswitch, diode toggle switch
- **POWER** 9V DC 2.1mm centre-negative adaptor only
- **DIMENSIONS** 143x118x39mm
- **CONTACT** High Tech Distribution 01722 410002 **fuzzrocious pedals.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ High-quality build and sounds
+ Well designed and usable features
- Not for fans of cascading gain stages
- Not everyone will appreciate the feedback feature...

More than just another high-end distortion unit, The Cat King could take care of all your gainy needs

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Fuzzrocious Blast Furnace

- **PRICE** £229
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal w/ momentary delay. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, repeats, internal tone switch, bypass footswitch, momentary delay footswitch
- **POWER** 9V DC 2.1mm centre-negative adaptor only
- **DIMENSIONS** 90x118x39mm

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ If you like this sort of thing, the Blast Furnace is an unstoppable juggernaut of sonic bad behaviour
- It's a bit bewildering and a little upsetting if you don't...

Part effects pedal, part exfoliant, the Blast Furnace is a force to be reckoned with. True fuzz lovers take notice

8/10

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MERIS
POLYMOON

The force is strong with this one... **RICHARD PURVIS** finds himself blasted off to a galaxy far, far away by the latest multi-talented digital stompbox from Meris

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Meris Polymoon

- **PRICE** £319
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital modulated delay pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Time, feedback, mix, multiply, dimension and dynamics, each with 'alt' editing function; tap-tempo and bypass footswitches; alt and phaser slow/sync buttons
- **FEATURES** Mono and stereo inputs and outputs, expression pedal input (also used for MIDI control); 24-bit converters, switchable buffered or relay bypass; 9V mains power only (included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 115x108x65mm
- **CONTACT** Sound Network 0203 008 7530
  meris.us

Forgive us, but we're a bit confused. Upon pulling the Polymoon out of its box we see a graphic of lunar phases, and the words 'sync phase' next to one of the buttons, so we think we know what kind of pedal this must be. But then we look in the manual and find a load of stuff about delay times, filters and dynamic flanging... what on earth (or indeed off earth) is going on here?

The answer is, this is a new entry in the ever-expanding field of what we'll call 'soundscape generators'. The Meris Polymoon is a 'super-modulated delay inspired by cascaded rack gear' – meaning it's a digital stompbox that's been designed to sound like plugging your guitar into an irresponsibly long chain of studio processors, asking the rest of the band to retreat to a safe distance and then turning all the knobs to full.

In case you missed our review of the Mercury7 and Ottobit Jr in our last *The Joy Of FX* mag, Meris is a California-based venture set up by former Line 6 and Strymon engineer Terry Burton. The company's first two pedals scored highly for tonal quality and functionality per square inch, but this is a more ambitious product. The basic journey we're talking about is a stereo delay mashed up into near-eternal reverb, coated in whooshy phasing and jammed through an envelope-following flanger. So yes, things could get a bit otherworldly.

First, let's go over some core specs. Like the Mercury7 and Ottobit Jr, this box has a fully analogue dry signal path, switchable true or buffered bypass, and 24-bit AD/DA conversion with 32-bit floating point DSP. There are stereo outputs and a switchable mono/stereo input, plus a socket for an expression pedal. Power comes from an included adaptor, but it'll run off any standard 9V supply that can pump out 150mA.

And now for the controls... The three at the top are simple enough: delay time, feedback and mix. The maximum time is 1.2 seconds, the feedback can go on forever (give or take a couple of millennia), and you can set mix to full for a 'wet only' signal. Below that we find a 'multiply' control for rhythmic delays, 'dimension' for smearing the repeats into something more like reverb, and the confusingly named 'dynamics' for controlling the intensity of the flanging effect.

Stay with us – there's lots more. Below that there's a button for engaging the phaser and synchronising its speed to the delay, and to the left above the tap-tempo footswitch is the Polymoon's secret weapon: the 'alt' button. Hold this

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down and all six knobs take on secondary functions. If we went through all of these there'd be no space left to talk about how the pedal sounds, but highlights include the ability to control the delay modulation, add a high or low filter to the repeats, and change the attack time of the flanger's envelope.

Now, turning to global setting configuration mode, we can... oh, forget it. Let's just plug the thing in and see what happens.

In Use

Our idea was to start with a simple delay, then dial in the wacky stuff. Fat chance. With all the controls at halfway, the Polymoon plunges us straight into the kind of multi-layered atmospherics that would disorientate a Martian. We're hearing more reverb than delay at this point, and more flange than phase, but it's noticeable that the original signal picks its way through the swirling clouds with impeccable clarity, thanks to that analogue dry-through path.

First plan out the window, we decide to take elements out one at a time in order to get our bearings before building them back up again. This, it turns out, is not as difficult as we feared. Pressing the phaser button twice removes one effect, turning the flanger dynamics down to zero removes another, and setting the dimension control to minimum leaves the delay repeats clean and un-smudged. With the tap multiple set to one, we now have a straight, lightly modulated digital delay.

It's quite a trip just to play a few notes then put your guitar down and listen to the waves of hypnotic ambience

The next move is to try some multi-taps... but first we plug the second output into another amp, because there's stereo ping-pong on offer. Settings two and three are the most useful but they're all a lot of fun, especially at slower time settings. After that the phaser comes back, and it sounds particularly psychedelic in stereo, while the flanger adds a watery dimension without getting too metallic.

A quick twist of the dimension knob sees those delay repeats begin to dissolve into an eerie, immersive reverb – and this is where the real hugeness happens. With feedback at full, it's quite a trip just to play a few notes then put your guitar down and listen to the waves of hypnotic ambience that the Polymoon pours back into the room. You will not want to go back to mono at this point.

The only pity is that there's no easy way to store these sounds to recall later. An expression pedal lets you fade between two settings, which can be a spooky delight, but for proper preset storage you'll need an appropriate MIDI device instead. We wouldn't bother, though – navigating the Polymoon soon becomes easy, and if you miss one fantastical soundscape there'll always be another one along in a minute.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Immense stereo soundscapes
+ Can combine delay, reverb, phase and flange in loads of different ways
+ Works great when you pair it with an expression pedal

- It's easy to overdo the 'epic'
- No easy way to store/recall presets

An astonishingly powerful little box that will take you tripping across the universe

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **EarthQuaker Devices Space Spiral** (**£205**) is another modulated delay with the emphasis on dreamy soundscapes, albeit in mono, while the **Eventide Space** (**£509**) uses advanced reverb algorithms to create huge sci-fi ambiences – among all sorts of other sounds. For something more quirky and unpredictable, try the wonderful **Red Panda Particle** (**£274**)

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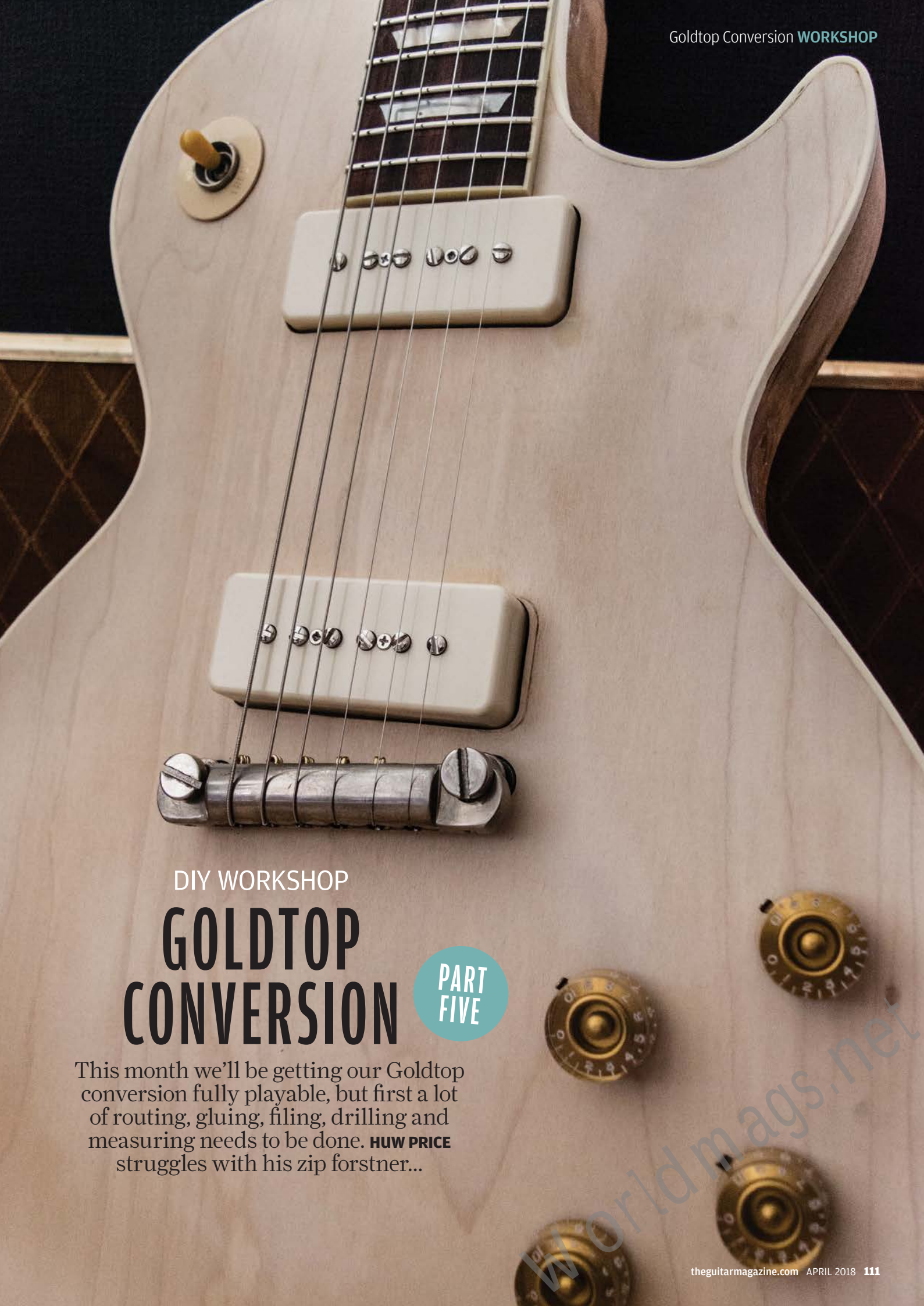

DIY WORKSHOP

GOLDTOP CONVERSION

PART FIVE

This month we'll be getting our Goldtop conversion fully playable, but first a lot of routing, gluing, filing, drilling and measuring needs to be done. **HUW PRICE** struggles with his zip forstner...

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1 A simple hole punch and a tortoiseshell plectrum are all you need to make 50s-style marker dots

2 Allowing for the yellowed lacquer, our dots look pretty close to the originals

3 A 3mm bit is used to drill out holes in the binding

4 After a drop of superglue in the hole, the dot is tapped in and within minutes it's ready for levelling

5 We deliberately went for some colour variation with the dots and after levelling they look pretty good

Last time in our Goldtop conversion, we applied the veneer to the body and installed the frets in our Greco's 'board, but now we have to get those frets levelled...

It may be tempting to level frets while a fingerboard is firmly fixed to a dead flat surface, but doing so will almost certainly result in you doing the job twice. Even if a neck seems straight before the board gets glued back on, with fret heights we're dealing in engineering tolerances and visual checks are insufficient to detect tiny irregularities.

I prefer to level things up by removing metal rather than wood, so it's time to glue the fretboard on. However, before doing so the dot markers must be installed along the fingerboard binding. If you forget, getting the dot holes drilled above the 14th fret will prove challenging.

Punching holes

Most agree that vintage Les Paul marker dots were some sort of dark tortoiseshell celluloid, so I'm going to make some. All you need is a tortoiseshell-style plectrum and a hole punch tool designed for adding holes to watch straps and belts. Usually pieces of material that get punched out are discarded, but here they're the bits we want to keep.

Examining some vintage dots, they are slightly irregular but the diameter averages out to just under 2.5mm. My hole punch has 2mm and 3mm, so I punch out some of each, drill some shallow 2mm and 3mm holes in some scrap binding and put them in with superglue. Once levelled off with 320 grit paper on a sanding block, I hold the sample dots up against the real thing.

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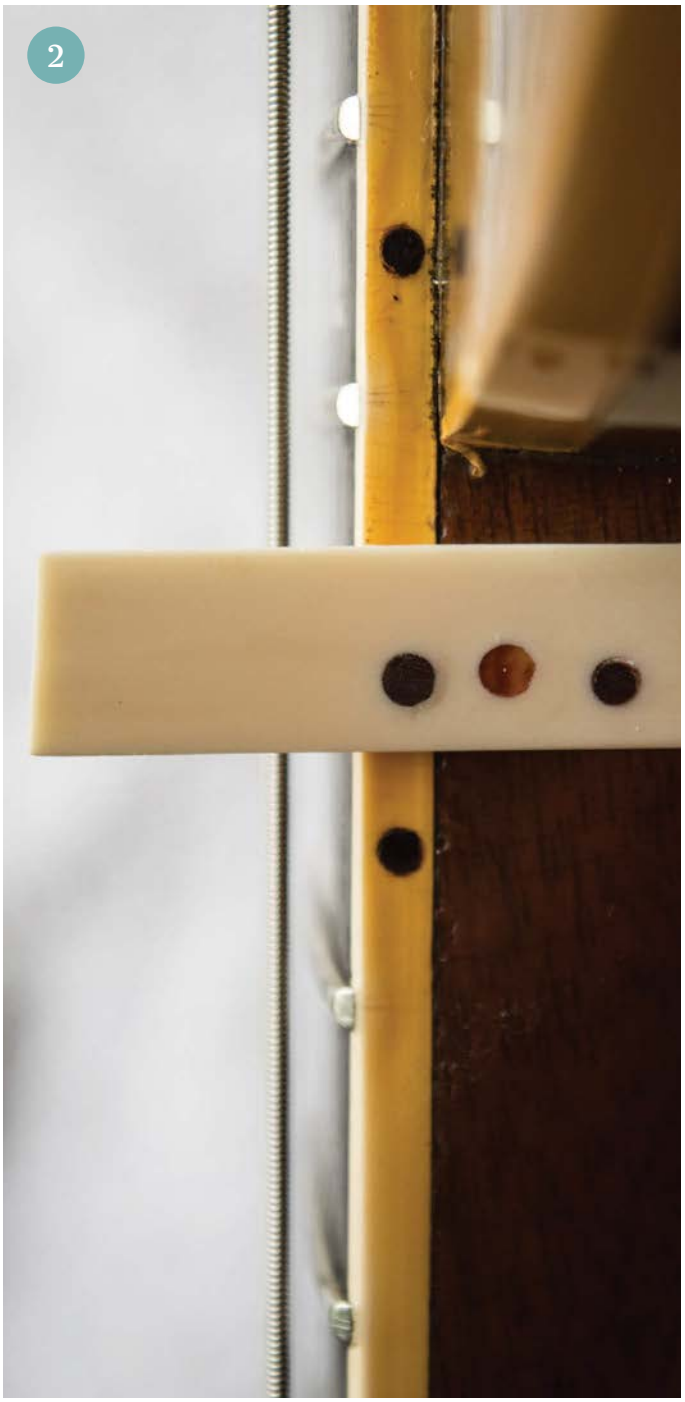

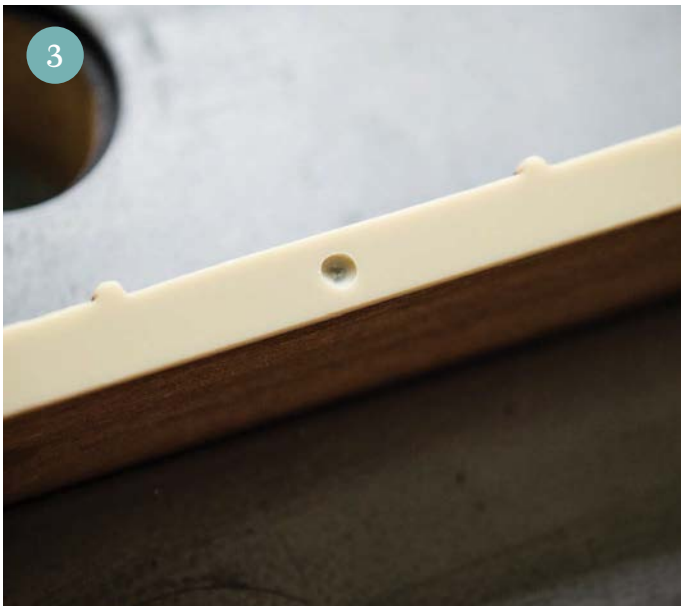

When installed, the 3mm dots measure about 2.7mm and although they look very slightly bigger, I decide to use them. The fingerboard binding is wider than usual due to the added 'board thickness, so the 3mm dots will appear in proportion. Without actually measuring, I mark the dot positions onto the board by eye and drill 3mm holes. A dab of superglue goes into each one, followed by a dot that's gently tapped in. Once all the dots are in, I level them off with a sanding block, taking care to remove as little binding as possible.

'Board stiff

Worryingly, sighting along the Greco's neck reveals a slight backwards twist below the 2nd

I make my own marker dots using a tortoiseshell plectrum and a hole punch tool

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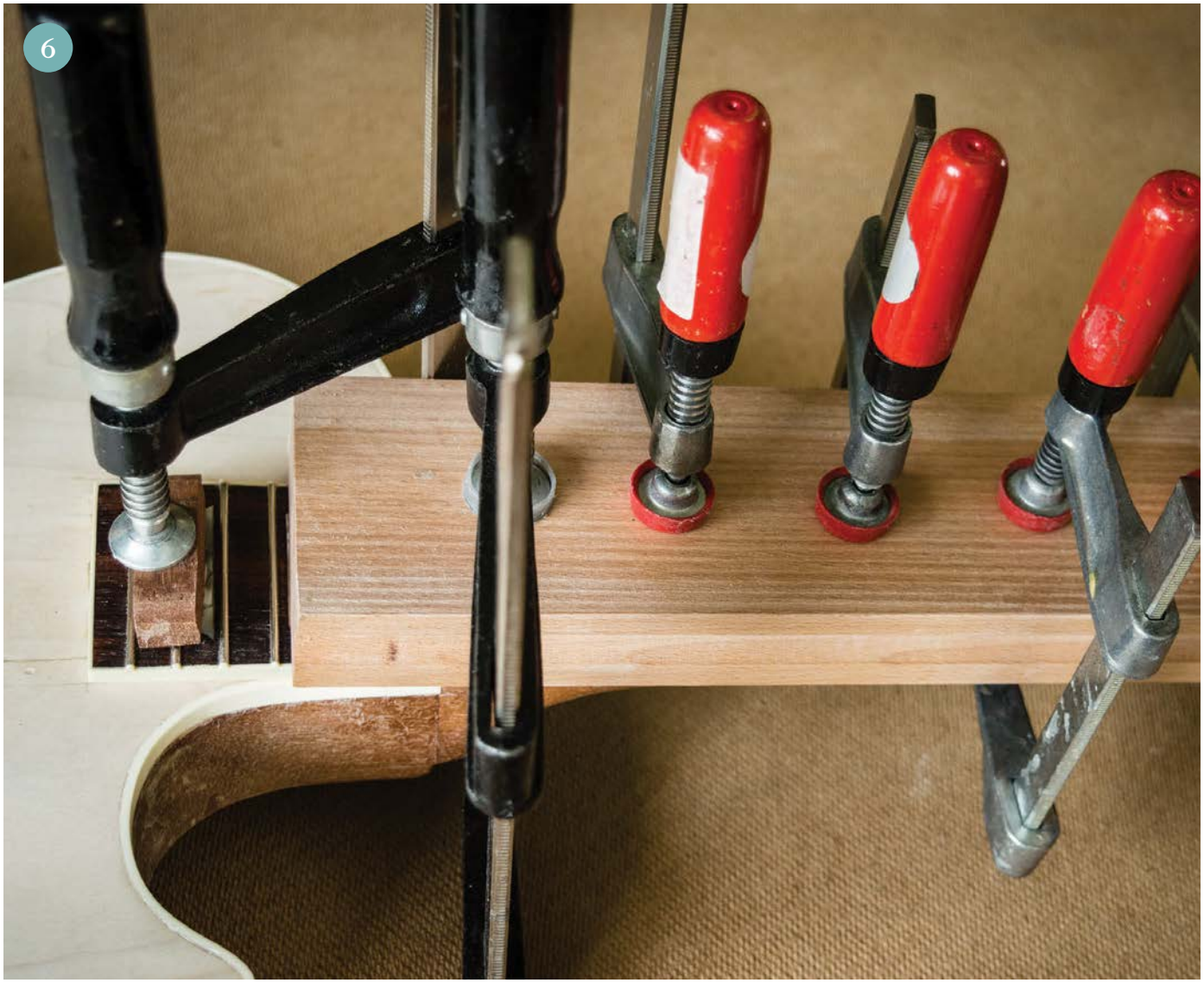

6 A 40cm radius block from Crimson Guitars makes a fine clamping caul and helps to correct a slight neck twist

fret on the treble side. This isn't something that's easily fixed, so I decide to glue the board back on using a 40cm radius block from Crimson Guitars as a clamping caul. The block is dead straight and sufficiently thick enough to resist bending. My hope is that gluing the neck and board back together while clamped against a straight block will pull things back into line.

The process of re-gluing a fingerboard was covered in one of my Gretsch 6120 conversion Workshops. You can read about it for yourself on theguitarmagazine.com so I won't repeat myself here. However, I will reiterate that index pins make 'board gluing relatively stress free and it's advisable to leave everything clamped up overnight.

For this project, I use Titebond Original and I'm careful to wipe away all the squeeze out while it's still fairly runny. With the clamps removed, I'm relieved to find that the twist has almost completely disappeared. I quickly sand off any binding overhangs so the neck feels smooth and I decide to string the guitar up.

First, I have to locate the bushing holes and knowing the approximate area, I lightly tap the top of the guitar's body while listening carefully. The areas with air rather than solid maple beneath them make a different sound, and I confirm the locations by gently tapping a pin through the top. Using a pin is preferable to a test drilling because if you get this wrong, you'll only have to fill a small and shallow pin hole.

With the bushing holes located I widen the pin holes with a 3mm drill bit then gently open them out using a small file. The bushings are tapped back in – remembering the ground wire on the treble side – with the studs screwed half way into the bushings. It's preferable to tap the studs rather than risk denting the body by attempting to tap the bushings in with a mallet.

With the old nut shimmed on a couple of veneer strips and the guitar strung up, I'm pleased to find it sounds as good as before and plays pretty well. I decide to level, crown and polish the frets because I want the guitar playing properly before I begin re-shaping the neck.

Best in profile

The increase in neck depth is immediately apparent, but the Greco still doesn't feel much like a proper 1950s Les Paul. The '54 Goldtop we measured has depth readings of 23.06mm, 23.97mm and 25.92mm at the 1st, 7th

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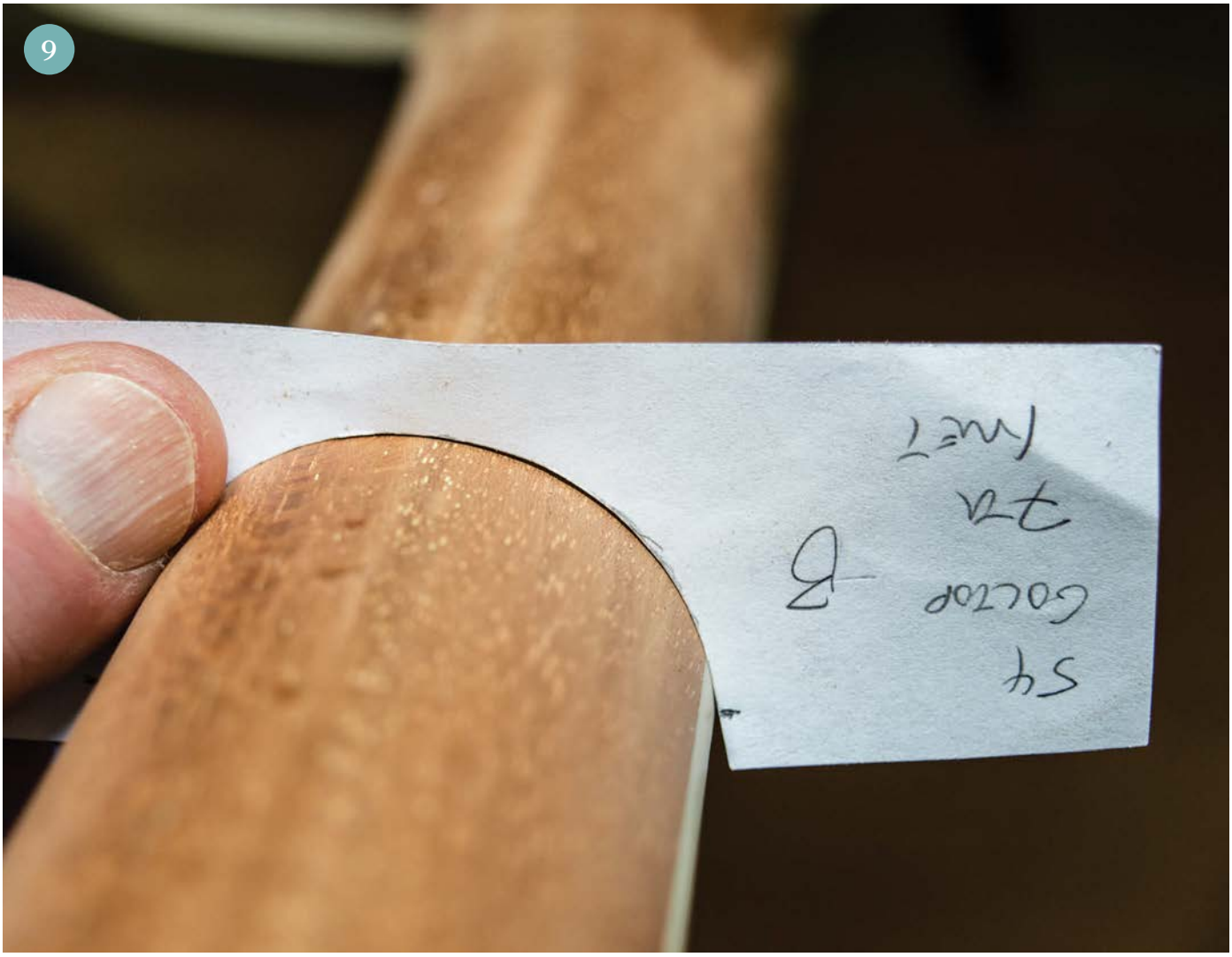

and 12th frets. The Greco now reads 22.48mm, 24.22mm and 27.05mm, so there's certainly enough wood to work with.

To approximate an authentically 1950s feel, I'll have to re-profile the neck, and that's where the neck templates I made from the '54 will be used. Offering them up to the Greco neck, it can be seen that the Greco has too much shoulder. I decide to make pencil marks on the wood where the neck touches the template, then I file wood from those areas before checking again with the templates.

Things begin with the templates sitting high on the neck. At first glance, you might think the neck has insufficient depth, but our measurements disprove that. By carefully removing wood from the spots that touch the templates, the templates gradually begin to drop lower onto the neck with more wood to template contact.

I work slowly, continually checking progress, and eventually the templates and neck shape begin to conform really well. The 7th fret template can be used further back along the neck and once I'm comfortable with the process, I begin to even things out between the 1st, 7th and 12th frets using a sanding block. It's also fascinating to experience how the feel of the guitar changes while you are working.

Although very little material is removed, the effect is dramatic. As my *TGM* colleague Ed Oleszko recently observed, "There's never anything in the way when you're playing a 50s Gibson neck". Their hybrid of a D and a very soft V conforms perfectly to the contours of your hand and, as I'm carving, I feel the neck – both literally and metaphorically – begin to vanish.

There is another observation worth making. It's often said that vintage Gibson necks all felt different because they were hand-carved. However, in my experience two 50s Gibsons from the same year tend to be more remarkable for their similarities than their differences. Just before getting into the neck reshaping, I borrowed a different 1954 Goldtop to make a second set of templates for comparison.

As it turned out it wasn't necessary, for the simple reason that the templates I made from the first '54 fit the second one perfectly. It was more than a close fit – it was absolutely identical. Granted two guitars hardly constitute a representative sample, but I'm not entirely surprised. To achieve that level of consistency demonstrates the extraordinary skill of the craftsmen who carved Gibson necks during that era.

Perfect Positioning

There's another good reason for re-stringing the guitar at this

7 The template demonstrates that there is too much shoulder and wood must be removed from the areas where the neck touches the template

8 Pencil marks show the high spots and help us to target the right areas with our files and scrapers

9 The altered profile is almost perfect and another fraction of a millimetre off the shoulders will finish the job

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10 **Establishing the correct pickup positions with the guitar strung up ensures the best alignment of strings and pole screws**

point, besides the opportunity to gauge the feel of the neck as it is being re-carved, and the sheer fun of it! When visiting with B&G Guitars a while back, luthier Eliran Barashi told me, "We rout the pickup cavities after the neck is attached so we can get a true centre line for the strings to line up exactly with the polepieces."

That stuck in my mind because it's surprising how many modern guitars turn up for review with misaligned pickups. I certainly didn't want to make the same mistake having gone to so much trouble correcting the Greco's misaligned bridge.

With insufficient body to string clearance to squeeze a P-90 cover into the neck position, I place the cover onto a piece of white card to trace around the outside, then I flip it upside down to mark the screw holes. With the card template cut out, I apply a little double-sided tape to the back, lessen its tack strength by sticking it onto my clothes and peeling it off a few times, and then place it in position on the body. Be careful with double sided tape on unfinished wood because it's strong enough to tear wood fibres.

I measure precisely three inches from the bridge side edge of my P-90 template to establish the position for the front edge of the bridge pickup cover. This time there's sufficient clearance for the cover itself. I slide it under the strings, align it with the strings and the edge line, and then mark around the cover and the card template. This establishes the exact positions for the new pickup cavities.

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BY · DENNIS · FANO

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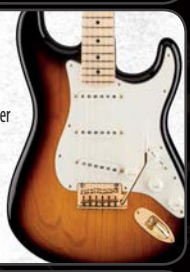

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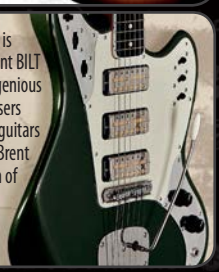

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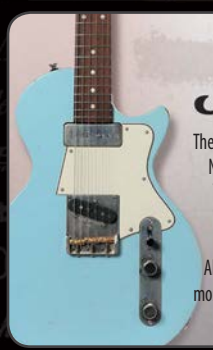

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11 A 28mm forstner bit removes most of the wood from the pickup holes before we begin routing

12 The routing template is in position and we are finally ready to rout holes for the P-90s

13 With the pickup routs done and the switch and control holes opened out, the guitar is ready for a trial assembly

Into The Hole

I'm hoping that routing the pickup holes will be the final scary part of this project, so with fingers firmly crossed I reach for the P-90 routing templates that Jim Lewis kindly made for me, along with the body cradle I made for routing the body in preparation for plugging.

The main difference this time is that the pickup routs must match the back angle of the neck. So, instead of having the body lie flat in its cradle, I decide to ramp it up at the neck end. With the cradle on a perfectly level surface, I place a length of 2x2cm wood under the body, oriented side-to-side to prevent the body from rocking, and slowly push it back until the fingerboard is level. You can place a spirit level along the fingerboard for this or even use a spirit level app on a smartphone.

Once the fingerboard is level, I clamp the body down using the same method detailed previously in this Workshop series and Jim's small P-90 template is used to create a template on a longer piece of 12mm MDF that spans the body cradle. However, before routing, I use a 28mm diameter forstner bit and a drill to hog out most of the wood. This is quicker and easier than doing it with a router, and far less risky.

The forstner bit takes the P-90 cavities to just short of full depth, then I carefully line up the routing template over the outline I marked in the bridge position. After clamping down the template, I re-check its alignment and fit a bearing guided router bit into my router.

Depth is set so the first pass only cuts a few millimetres into the body. Trying to take out too much wood in one go, increases the likelihood of tearing chunks of the body. I take it gradually, dropping the router bit 3 or 4mm lower for each pass until the hole depth matches the readings I took from the '54 Goldtop.

With the router bit butted up against the treble side of the hole, I mark the edge of the router base on the template and then measure half an inch towards the bass side and use double-sided tape to stick a wood baton across the template. This creates an end stop for router base.

The bit is lowered further and I rout the square-ish lower section on the treble side. I then remove the wood end stop, slide

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the router template towards the bridge until the router bit is lined up on the centre line of the cavity. The template is re-clamped and without altering bit depth, I rout the trough that provides clearance for the pole screws.

Besides some minor veneer chip out on the treble side that I have to patch up, all goes fairly well. I employ a little guesswork to locate the wire channel under the corner of the pickup cavity with a 3mm drill bit and I use an 8mm to widen the hole.

The process is repeated for the neck pickup cavity and after opening out the switch and control holes I'm ready to install the pickups and test that the wiring can still be routed through the body. Fortunately, everything works, and in the next instalment the body will be painted. I'll also go shopping for parts, and engage in a bit of relicing.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw returns to his Martin DIY kit build project, and he's finally putting the body together

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All About... Ray Butts

If Ray Butts still around, he'd be the embodiment of boutique. **HUW PRICE** profiles a man ahead of his time...

Ray Butts may not be a 'name' in every guitar household, but as an inventor and engineer working in the early days of electric guitar, his influence has been profound. Unlike Les Paul who, as Chet Atkins once wryly pointed out, "invented everything", Ray's significance rests on two things – his work as a custom amp builder and the invention of the humbucking guitar pickup.

Like Leo Fender, Ray wasn't much of a guitar player, but at least he was a professional musician. He played accordion for a travelling tent show called the 'Hillbilly Jamboree featuring the Colorado Cowhands'. There's a great photo of Ray taken around that time when he was in his 20s. He's pictured wearing a peaked cap and with a menacing pout, Ray somehow manages to look like a cross between Al Capone, Fatty Arbuckle and Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*.

Ray's interest in electronics first led to him building a crystal radio at the age of eight, and his childhood nickname was the not at all understated 'genius'. In Cairo, he began working as a warranty repair man, servicing domestic appliances and radios, but Ray soon found a way to combine his engineering expertise with his interest in music. In 1951 he opened a music shop called Ray Butts Music, with his wife Ann on the sales desk and Ray out back building stuff and doing the repairs.

Such was the ingenuity of Ray's tape echo design, was basically copied to create the legendary Echoplex

Eventually Ray reached Nashville, Tennessee, where his band got a radio gig playing on *The Morning Show* for WSM. Later he went back to Calumet City, Illinois, but after his father's heart attack, he returned home to Cairo, Illinois and Ray's playing career was over. However, his real career was about to begin.

Echosonics

Ray and Ann might have lived out a contented existence running one of many thousands of 'mom and pop' music stores that could be found all over America. However, an unusual request from a guitarist called Bill Gwaltney took Ray's life in an exciting new direction.

Ray and Bill had been close friends since playing in a band together and even released a few 78s. Bill also worked as a salesman and delivery guy at Ray's shop, but he was a huge Les Paul fan and he wanted to be able to mimic Les' echo effects while playing live and he asked Ray to build him a guitar amp with built-in echo.

In a 1994 interview with Dave Kyle for Vintage Guitar,

Butts was instrumental in Gretsch's early experiments in stereo, such as this set on display at Old Hat guitars in Lincolnshire

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Ray recalls, "I had an old Gibson with two 6V6s, probably about 15 watts and experimented first with a wire recorder. The only problem that thing had was the wire had to be tied together in a loop and when the knot would go across the head, it made a click, click, click. I searched all over trying to find a continuous loop, with no luck and then got the idea to use a tape unit".

In a 2011 interview with *MNJ*, Bill recounts that Ray, "Was that good and I knew he could do it. I admire him for all the time and patience he did to get this thing going for me. I'll never forget when he called me to play on the first old wire job that popped when the wire passed the playback head. He perfected the tape job about a year later".

Ray had built his first Echosonic amplifier with an integral tape echo installed in the base of the cabinet. This was revolutionary stuff for the early 1950s when you consider that custom guitar amps were unheard of and the first amps with reverb wouldn't appear until 1961.

Such was the ingenuity of Ray's tape echo design that Mike Battle and Don Dixon basically copied it to create the Maestro Echoplex in 1959. To gauge the significance of the Echoplex, just Google a list of guitarists who used one. All Ray all got in return from the Echoplex manufacturers was a 'nominal payment'.

Meanwhile Ray had built a second Echosonic and with a $495 amp to sell, he hit the road, wound up in Nashville and looked Chet Atkins' number up in the phone directory. Chet tried the amp and used it the following night for a show at the Grand Ole Opry – having handed Ray $395 and a tweed Fender amp in part exchange.

This was a great boost for Ray, who went on to sell another five amps before Elvis guitarist Scotty Moore bought number eight on 24 May 1955. It replaced Scotty's TV Deluxe and can be heard on the songs *I Forgot To Remember To Forget*, *Mystery Train* and *When It Rains It Really Pours*. Equipped with his Echosonic, Scotty could replicate Sam Phillips' slapback echo effect when playing live. He used it up until 1968, usually with a pair of 50-watt satellite amplifiers Ray made him to bump up the volume.

With such high-profile endorsers, Ray struggled to keep up with demand and would only ever build 68 Echosonics. Eventually he licensed Rickenbacker to manufacture a production version that became known as the Eko-Sound. Given his role as bespoke amp builder to the stars, you could describe Ray as the Howard Dumble of the 1950s – albeit minus the self-mythologising and combative approach to customer relations. But that's only half the story.

Chet Atkins tried out Ray's Echosonic amp, and used it the following night for a show at the Grand Ole Opry

Bucking The Trend

This bit may be contentious, but Ray Butts has a reasonable claim to be the inventor of the humbucking pickup. However, Seth Lover over at Gibson can make the same claim – so what gives? Well, in *The Gretsch Book* by Tony Bacon and Paul Day, it's noted that both designs were actually introduced at the same Summer NAMM show in 1957, so it seems like a curious coincidence as opposed to anything nefarious.

There's no doubt that noise was an issue in various fields of electronics at the time, and as a result, plenty of engineers would have been looking at ways to combat it. Electrovoice invented a hum-cancelling coil in 1934 and tape machine manufacturer Ampex had devised a method using a transformer-based hum-cancelling circuit for recording heads.

Ray is on record as saying that he was aware of Ampex's work and realised the same principle could be applied to

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Ray Butts in his early 20s – he'd go on to be a hugely influential musical innovator

pickup design. In contrast, Seth Lover took his inspiration from a hum-reduction choke used in some Gibson amplifiers.

Chet Atkins was certainly happy with Ray's Echosonic amp, and he soon enlisted him to help build a recording studio in Chet's garage. Ray even began picking up sound engineering work with Sam Phillips. No doubt Ray and Chet had a lot to talk about – not least Chet's continuing dissatisfaction with the DeArmond pickups in the Gretsch guitars he was endorsing.

"I kept telling Ray how unhappy I was", Chet recalled. "I had to twist my body around to get the guitar in a certain position relative to the amp to get rid of the humming. One day he came down to Nashville and had this rough looking pickup on an old guitar. He said how would you like a pickup that doesn't hum?"

Ray had built working humbuckers a year prior to their commercial release in 1954

Chet installed prototypes with white bobbins in a sealed-top black 6120 prototype that he used as a testbed guitar. There are authenticated photos taken at a Grand Ole Opry show in September 1956 that show Chet playing the guitar with Ray's pickups. On that basis we can establish that Ray had working humbuckers a year prior to their commercial release. Ray himself recalled that he first showed Chet a humbucking guitar pickup in 1954, and if that is correct he was about a year earlier than Seth Lover.

'Tron But Not Forgotten

Either way, when Chet approached Gretsch, the timing couldn't have been better. DeArmond had started supplying pickups to Gretsch's direct competitors including Guild and Epiphone, as well as cheaper manufacturers such as Harmony, and the Gretsch guys weren't at all pleased.

Ray had been keen to manufacture the pickups himself, but given the sheer numbers that would be required, this proved unworkable. Instead, it was agreed that Gretsch would manufacture them in-house and Ray would be paid a royalty.

Working closely with Jimmie Webster at Gretsch, Ray helped to create a production version of his pickup, which Gretsch dubbed the 'Filter'Tron Electronic Guitar Head', and he re-designed the wiring harness to go with it. Later Ray designed the stereo pickup system that would be used in the White Falcon.

As for claims to be the inventor of the humbucker, the dispute between Gretsch and Gibson in the wake of the 1957 NAMM show is well known. Fortunately, Fred Gretsch and Gibson's Ted McCarty eventually reached a gentleman's agreement.

Both companies lodged applications for patents – hence the 'Patent Applied For' decals on the back of Gibson's pickups and the stamp on Filter'Tron covers. Both companies were granted patents, and by the end of 1960 Filter'Tron covers were stamped 'US Pat 2892371'.

The Perfect Pickup

Ray carried on hand-building pickups of his own design for many years and he was on a quest to make "the perfect jazz pickup". Later Butts pickups do show up online, and they fetch pretty high prices when they do.

Then, in 2017 – exactly 60 years after the Filter'Tron was launched – Ray's name was back in the headlines. Working with Butts' children, Katha and Randy, Gretsch pickup specialist TV Jones released the Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity Filter'Tron. The new pickup was created by Jones to Butts' personal specifications – drawing from Butts's personal research notes, designs and journals, as well as detailed analysis of the original Filter'Tron pickup. Ray might have passed away in 2003, aged 83, but his legacy as a musical innovator is more secure than ever.

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Chord Clinic

Hard on the heels of last month's sus2 and sus4 work-out we move onto added 11ths and ninths. **ROD FOGG** goes up the octave...

In a Csus2 chord you have the notes C, D and G, and the second, D, is 'suspended', taking the place of the major third, E, usually found in the major triad of C, E and G. Cadd9 also includes the note D, though we think of it as shifted up an octave to become the ninth, but unlike the sus2 chord it retains the third in the chord; C, E, G, D, for example. Check out figure 1 for examples of these chords.

It's the same with sus4 and add11 chords. The sus4 takes the place of the third, giving you C, F and G. The add11 is added on top of the existing root, third and fifth, making C, E, G and F. Added notes such as ninths and elevenths are conventionally viewed as coming from the upper octave, but nowadays Cadd2 and Cadd4 are becoming more common and it is now okay to ignore the 'up the octave' rule. Being sticklers here at Chord Clinic we've stuck with add9 and add11.

The Csus2 has an attractive, open sound, but the Cadd9 has an altogether warmer flavour and can be used standalone or to progress to a regular C major chord. The Cadd11 has a more intense tang due to the presence of both E and F in the chord. Experiment with a resolution to a standard C major open string chord here as well. They sound good strummed on an acoustic guitar but can also work well with intricate arpeggios as well.

Figure 2 hops over to G major for Gadd11 and Gadd9 – both of which sound good followed by a regular open string G major chord. Experiment with switching back and forth between these chords and then try making them part of a longer chord sequence involving the chords in figure 1. In Figure 3 we switch to the key of A, this time with the major third, C sharp, in the bass for both A and Aadd11; these chords work well strummed one after the other in a rhythm of your choice, as do the following Aadd9 and A major chords, which have the root note restored to where it belongs, in the bass.

We can create some interesting progressions if we involve the chords from figure 4. For example, switch back and forth between Aadd9 and A for a couple of bars and then play two bars of Dadd9. Then try the same trick using Aadd11/C♯ and A/C♯ moving onto Dadd11. We like the crunchiness of the fourth fret F♯ and open G sounding together

Figure 1

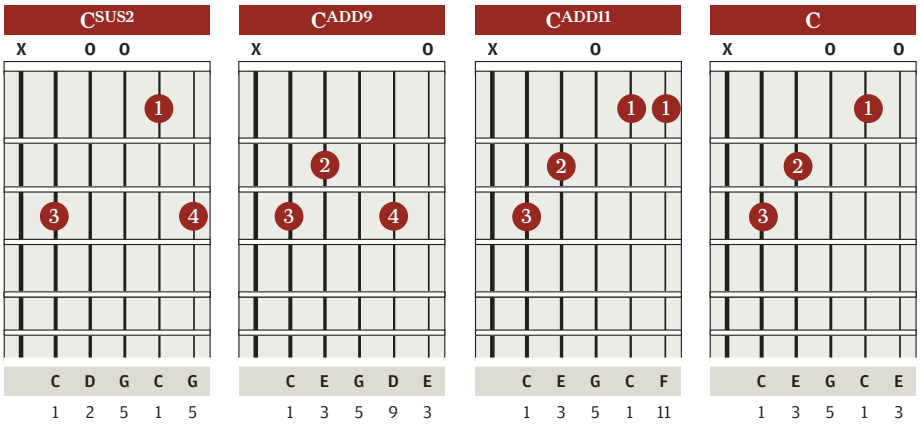

Figure 2

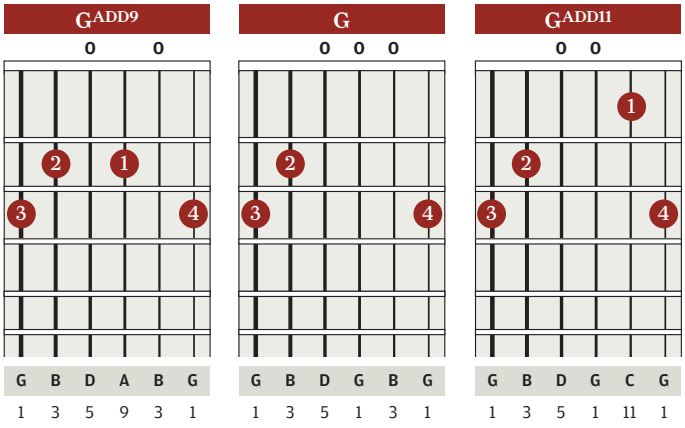

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Figure 3

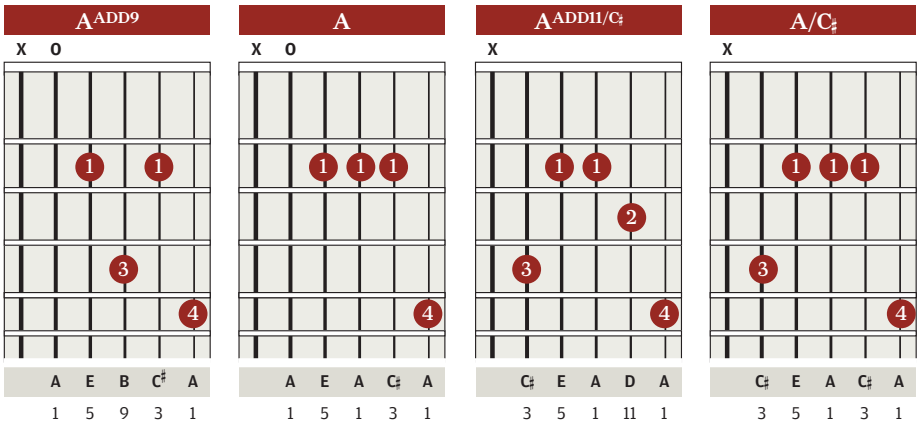
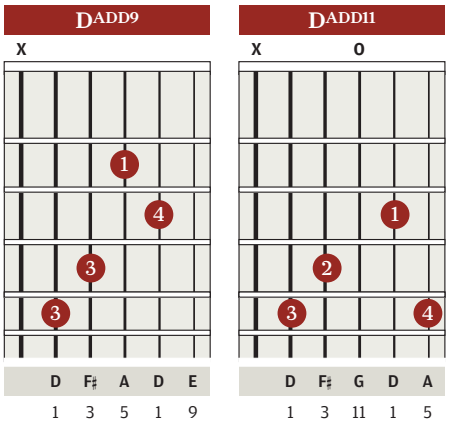
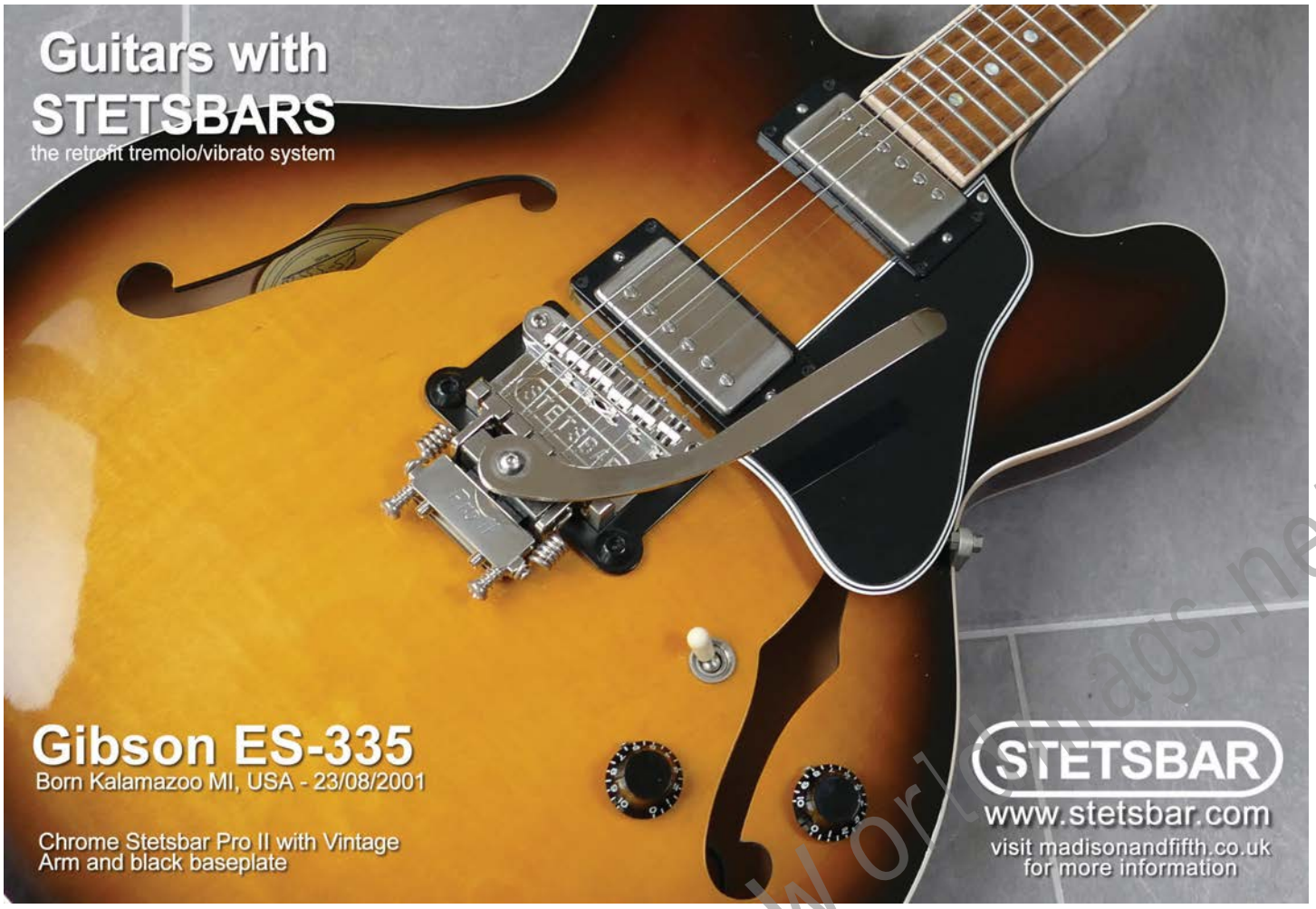
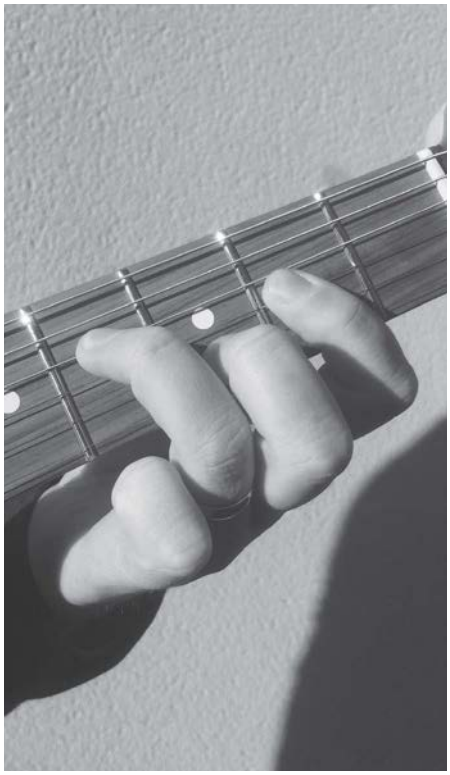


Figure 4







in this Dadd11 chord, and the instability that the C♯ bass brings to the two A chords. This month's theory moment is just to say that when the third of the chord is in the bass it is known as a first inversion. If the root is in the bass it is in root position, and if the fifth is in the bass it's a second inversion. Which brings us neatly to figure 5.

Figure 5 checks out two alternative versions of Dadd9 and Dadd11 – this time with the open A string, the fifth of the chord, in the bass. In other words, both are in second inversion. Having the ninth and the 11th available on the same string introduces some melodic possibilities at the top end of these chords; Dadd9 to D, followed by Dadd11 to D sounds good, but you should be able to find some equally useful alternatives. Then try joining these chords up with those in figure 3. We felt that the two shapes with the C♯ bass worked particularly well.

On to figure 6, where we now find ourselves in the key of E. Alternating between Eadd11 and Eadd9 sounds very cool, and the opened out E major shape is supplied as well, should you wish to add it to the sequence. E, Eadd11, Eadd9 is one to try.

We've included two of the easiest add9 chords on the guitar, both of which add open strings to familiar shapes. Enter figure 7, with A and D barre chords at the fifth fret, with the barre lifted so that the top one or two strings can sound open in a pleasingly jangly style. Figure 8 also has Aadd9 and Dadd9, but this time as stretchy, but movable shapes, just in case you wish to try these chords in keys which are less open-string friendly. Enjoy these tasty added-note sounds and look out for more next month.

Figure 5

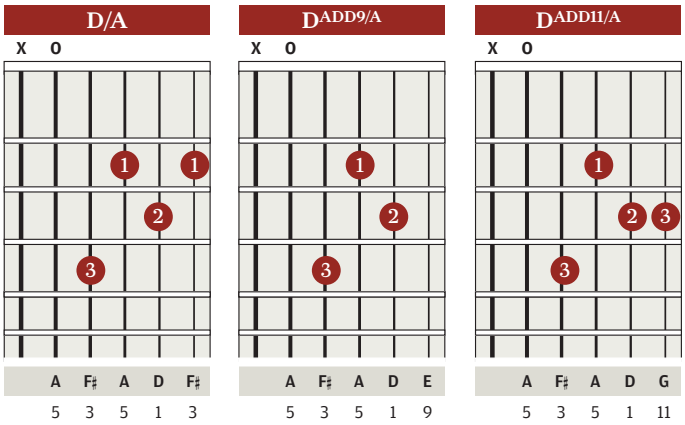


Figure 6

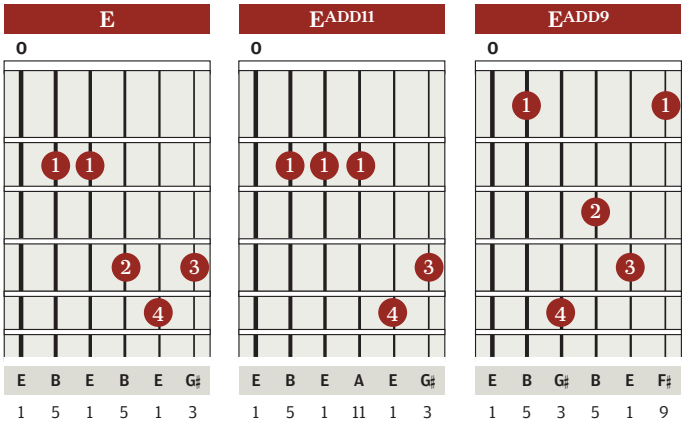


Figure 7

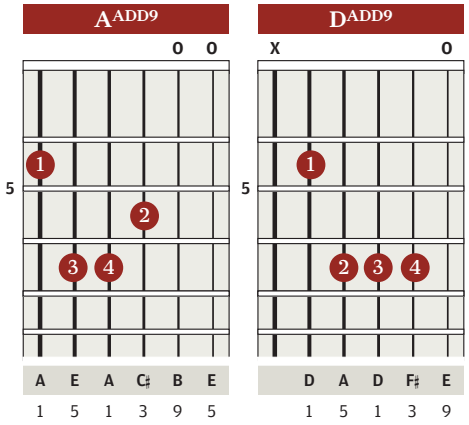
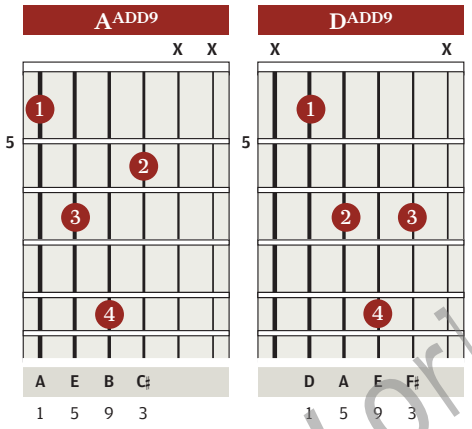


Figure 8



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Jerry Douglas

The Grammy-winning slide maestro on old Dobros, talking hands, and why there's no fury like a wife scorned...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I have an old original Dobro, a model 37, which meant a $37 guitar in 1934. It's been with me since 1974. It's earned its keep and I could never part with it."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"I had plans of going to university on an English scholarship. Then between my last two years of high school I did a summer travelling with a bluegrass band called the Country Gentlemen. My plans all changed at that point..."

3 The moment it all started...
"I was in a jam with some of my heroes that first summer. Earl Scruggs, Vassar Clements, and the Dirt Band were jamming backstage before their show. I jumped in and they asked me to play the show. That made my mind up for me."

4 The one that got away...
"I've only sold one instrument in my life. It was an old Dobro that I sold to buy that old model 37. I recently tried to get it back and the owner said he would give it back, but his wife was mad at me for not including him in a record of Dobro players some years back called *The Great Dobro Sessions*. So I guess that one is gone!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Many years ago, before cellphones, I was travelling with Tim O'Brien to a festival we were both playing. Six of us flew into San Francisco and rented two vans and headed north toward Yosemite. Somehow we got separated for a couple of minutes before hooking back up with what we thought was the other van. So we continued following them even after they made a turn off the highway. We followed them blindly until they turned into a driveway and the garage door went up... it wasn't even them! Realising our mistake we got out of the subdivision and found our way through the maze of streets and back to the highway. We raced about three exits down and pulled into a gas station. To our amazement, our other van was there as well. God plays tricks on you sometimes."

6 The best advice that I've ever been given...
"While I was playing on a wonderful Emmylou Harris album called *Roses In The Snow*, producer Brian Ahern told me that when you're backing a singer, especially female, don't play on top of the lyrics or in the same frequency range. As far as I'm concerned Brian is one of the most underrated producers of all time. He educated an entire phalanx of important musical people – including Rodney Crowell, Ricky Skaggs, Rosanne Cash. I've used his advice my entire career."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I play the opening line of my song, *Pushed Too Far* – the slow down to long sustained notes is good for tone and getting my hands to speak to each other."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Ginger ale! Ever since I stopped taking alcohol eight years ago, I've become a connoisseur, and the best I've found is made in South Carolina by a company called Blenheim's. Get the hot one with the red cap."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"An artist by the name of Gabriela put out a record of Bill Frisell songs with Spanish lyrics. I don't understand Spanish, but it goes perfectly with the tunes. Bill and Viktor Krauss play on there as well. It never fails to chill me out."

10 If I could play one thing...
"*Teentown*! I'm chasing it though. Anything by Weather Report is worth learning."

The Jerry Douglas Band's new album, *What If* is out now.

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